STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 114

20p

THE LAST BATTLEGROUND

STARBLAZER

BY 2400, HI-TECHNOLOGY HAD TAKEN OVER MAN'S CONQUEST OF THE GALAXY. COMPUTER CONTROLLED AUTO-PILOTS TOOK A STARSHIP INTO HYPER SPACE, AND BROUGHT IT OUT AT ANY PRE-SET CONFIGURATION OF SPACIAL CO-ORDINATES. WHEN IT CAME TO GALACTIC WARFARE, MICRO-CHIP MEMORIES CAME UP WITH THE BEST RESPONSE TO TEN-THOUSAND MODES OF AGGRESSION.

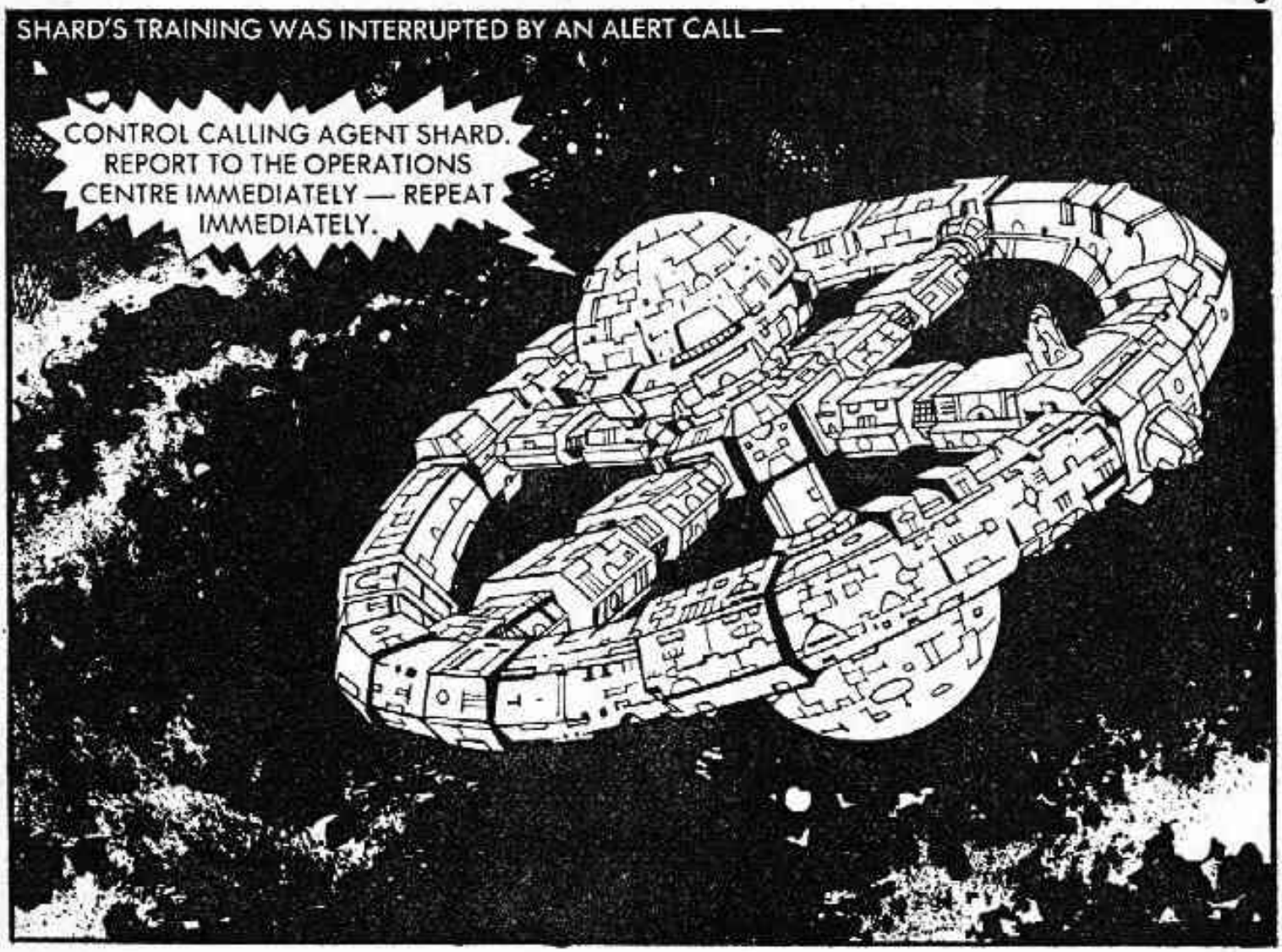
BUT WHEN HIGH-COMMAND NEEDED A RESPONSE TO THREAT TEN-THOUSAND AND ONE, THEY HAD TO DEPLOY THAT MOST IMPERFECT AND ILLOGICAL INSTRUMENT — THE HUMAN BEING. FACED WITH OBLITERATION BY AN ALIEN MEGA-WEAPON, TERRAN HIGH-COMMAND SENT FOR THE MOST ILLOGICAL OF THEIR AGENTS, SHARD, WHO WAS TO MEET THE ENEMY IN DEEP, SILENT SPACE —

THE LAST BATTLEGROUND

INSIDE A DEEP SPACE STATION, SPECIAL AGENT SHARD WAS UP AGAINST IT . . . ONCE AGAIN.

BUT SHARD WAS QUICK —

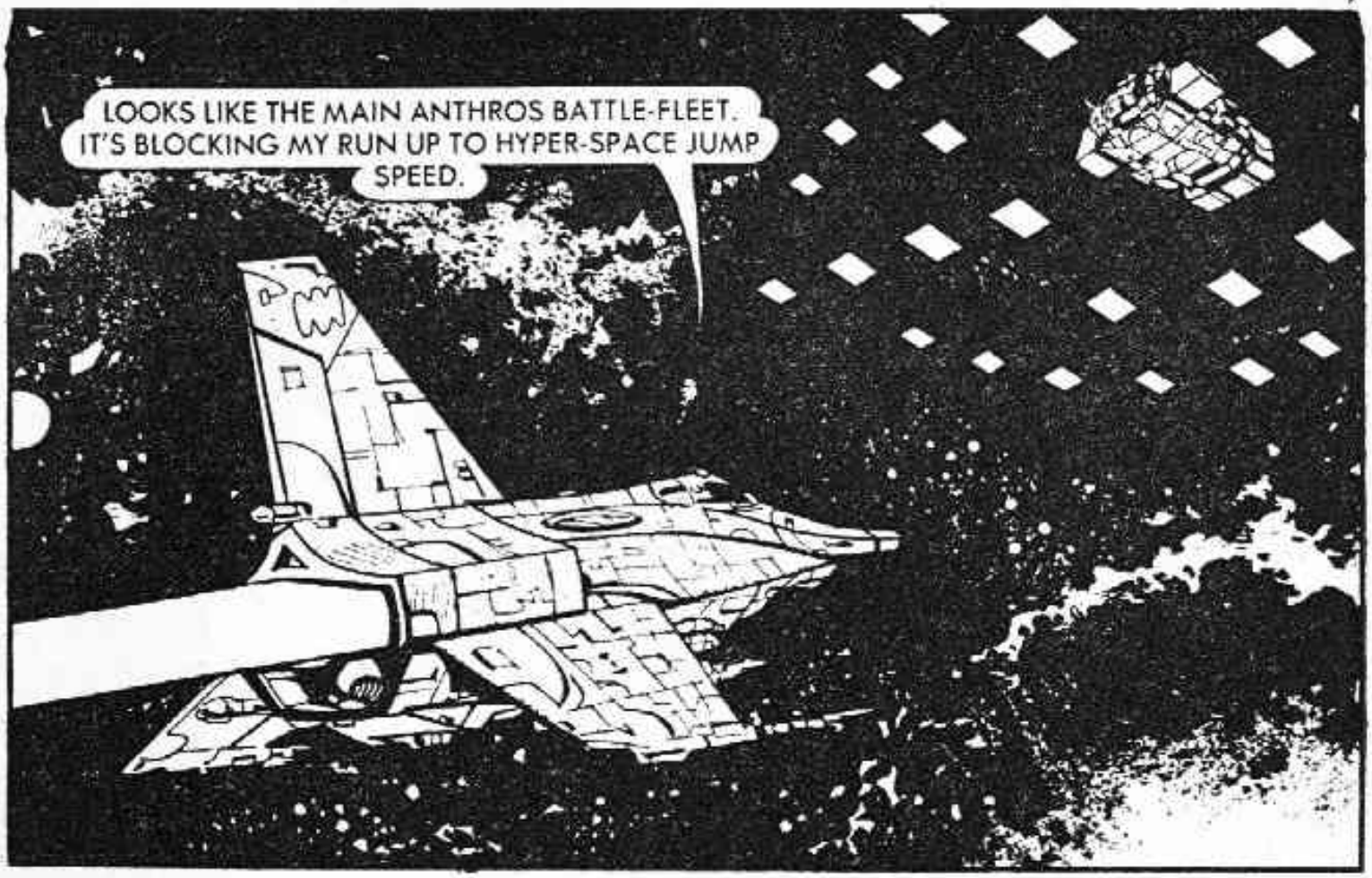
0.07 OF A SECOND SLOW: LET'S HOPE THE REAL ANTHROS AREN'T ANY BETTER.

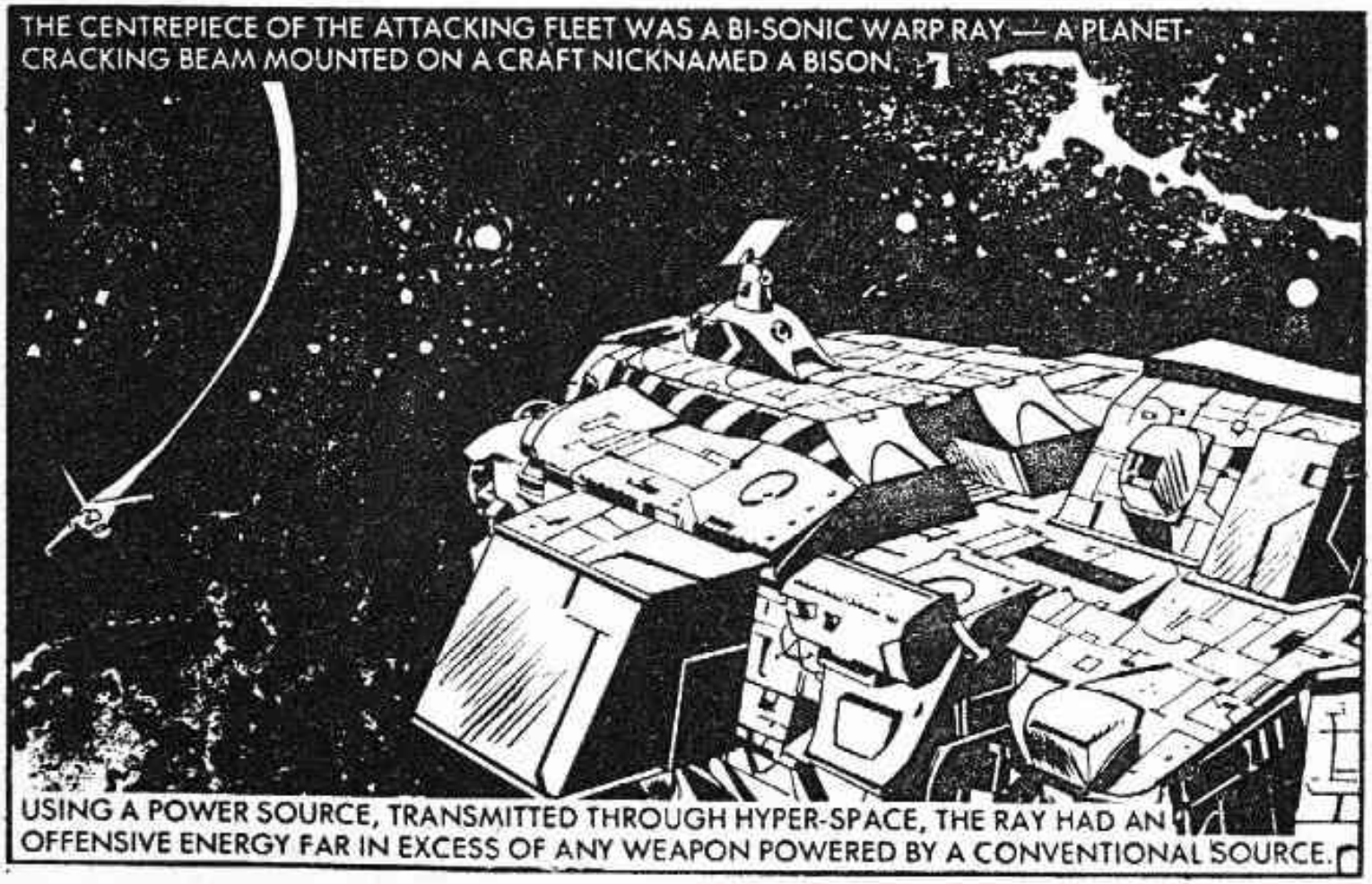

SHARD'S TRAINING WAS INTERRUPTED BY AN ALERT CALL —
CONTROL CALLING AGENT SHARD. REPORT TO THE OPERATIONS CENTRE IMMEDIATELY — REPEAT IMMEDIATELY.

SHARD MADE HIS WAY TO THE OPCENTRE —
. . . SO NOW YOU KNOW YOUR ASSIGNMENT, SHARD. ELIMINATE THE ENEMY'S WARP-RAY CAPABILITY. HERE'S THE LATEST INTELLIGENCE UP-DATE . . . GET YOURSELF OPERATIONAL AT ONCE, BECAUSE WE'RE ABOUT TO COME UNDER ANTHROS ATTACK.

ALERT STATE RED
ALL PERSONNEL!
I DON'T LIKE LEAVING A FIGHT, BUT TAKING OUT THAT WARP-RAY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE SURVIVAL OF THIS OUTPOST.

SHARD'S SPACE FIGHTER CLEARED THE STATION —
PLUTO'S SHADES! THE ENEMY ARE CLOSE ENOUGH TO REGISTER ON MY SCAN-SCREENS!

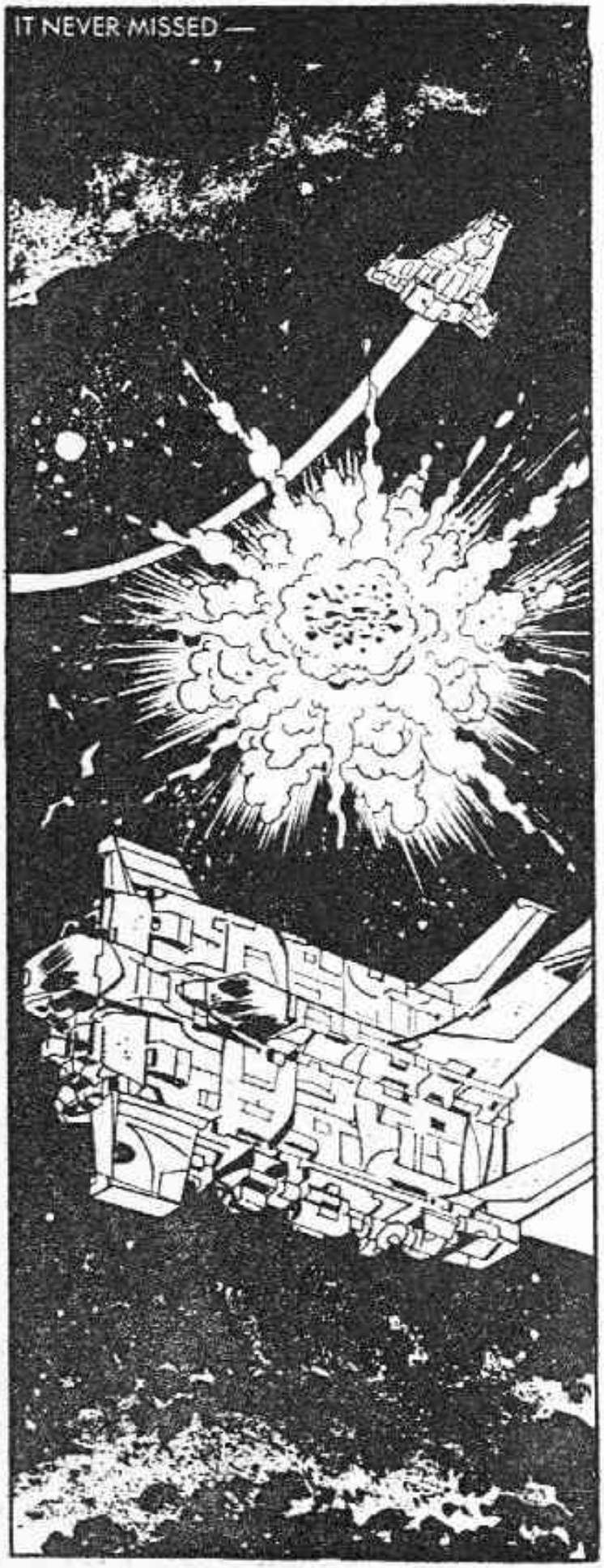

LOOKS LIKE THE MAIN ANTHROS BATTLE-FLEET. IT'S BLOCKING MY RUN UP TO HYPER-SPACE JUMP SPEED.


THE CENTREPIECE OF THE ATTACKING FLEET WAS A BI-SONIC WARP RAY — A PLANET-CRACKING BEAM MOUNTED ON A CRAFT NICKNAMED A BISON.
USING A POWER SOURCE, TRANSMITTED THROUGH HYPER-SPACE, THE RAY HAD AN OFFENSIVE ENERGY FAR IN EXCESS OF ANY WEAPON POWERED BY A CONVENTIONAL SOURCE.

THE WARP-RAY WAS RESERVED FOR MAJOR TARGETS.
OUR SYSTEMS HAVE LOCKED-ON TO THE EARTHMAN, THE COUNTDOWN TO HIS DESTRUCTION HAS BEGUN.
ESCORT SHIPS WILL DEAL WITH APPROACHING TERRAN DEFENDER.

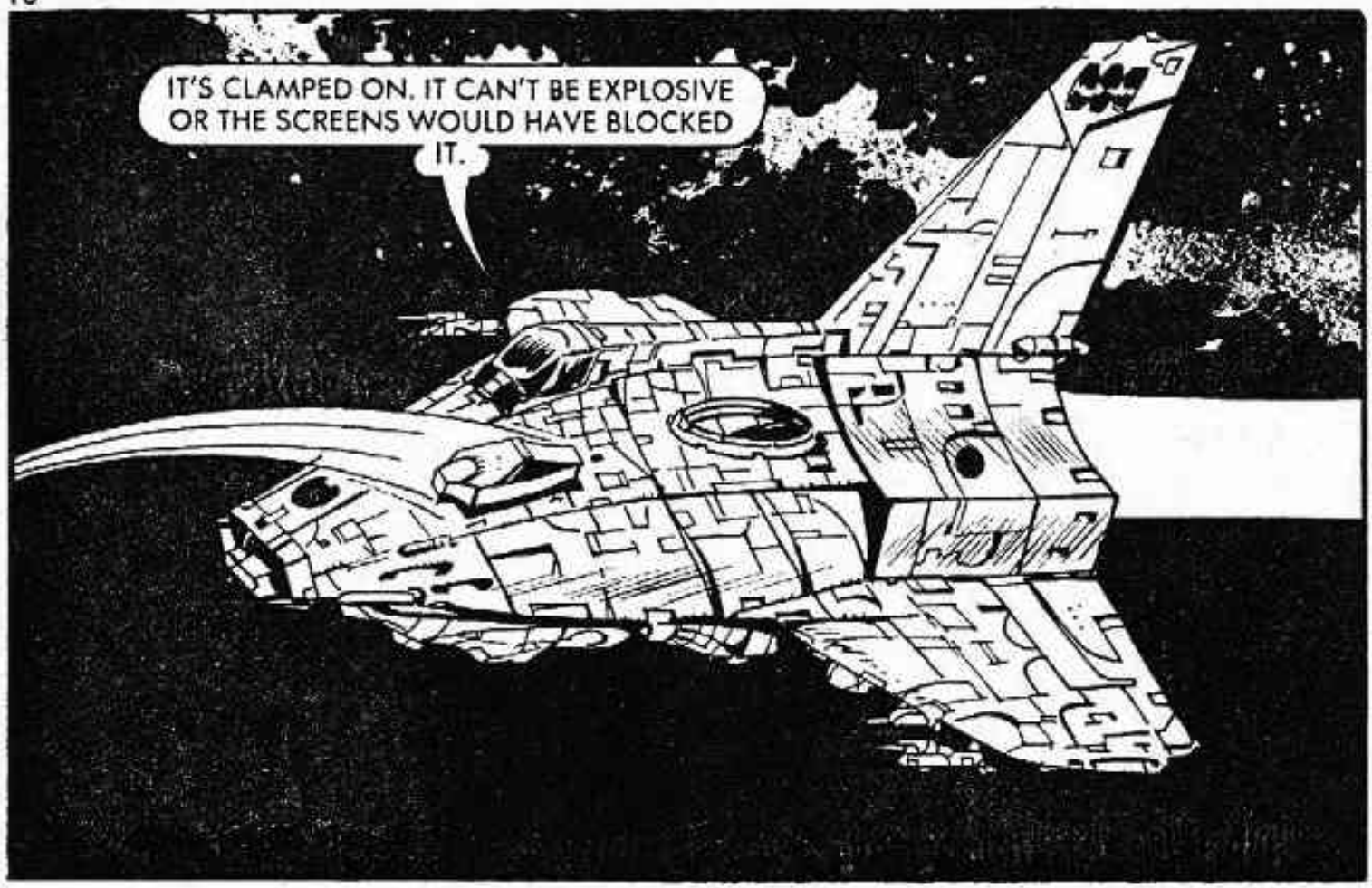
SHARD HAD LOCKED HIS SCANNERS ON TO THE COMMAND CRAFT —
THAT SHOWS THE COMPUTER WHAT IT'S LOOKING FOR, THE REST IS UP TO THE ELECTRONICS.

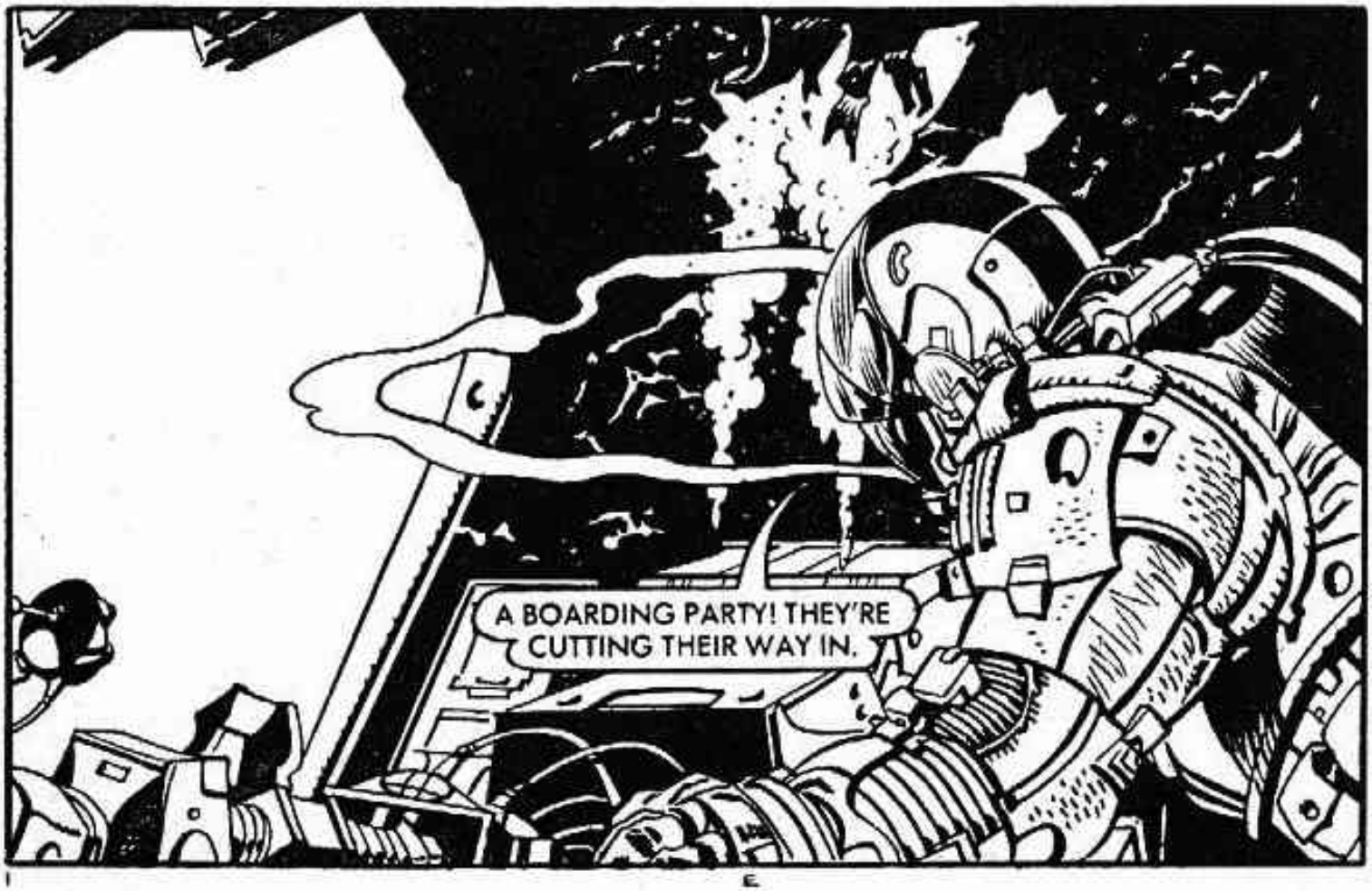
THE TERRAN MISSILE HELD A THREE DIMENSIONAL IMAGE OF THE PROGRAMMED TARGET IN ITS ELECTRONIC MEMORY. IT ALSO WAITED UNTIL THERE WAS A WEAKNESS IN THE TARGET'S DEFENSIVE SCREENS BEFORE FIRING.


IT NEVER MISSED —

BLAST! THEY'VE FOUND THE RIGHT WAVELENGTH TO JAM MY ELECTRONICS. ALL I CAN DO IS SIT BEHIND DEFENSIVE SCREENS TRYING TO AIM BY HAND.

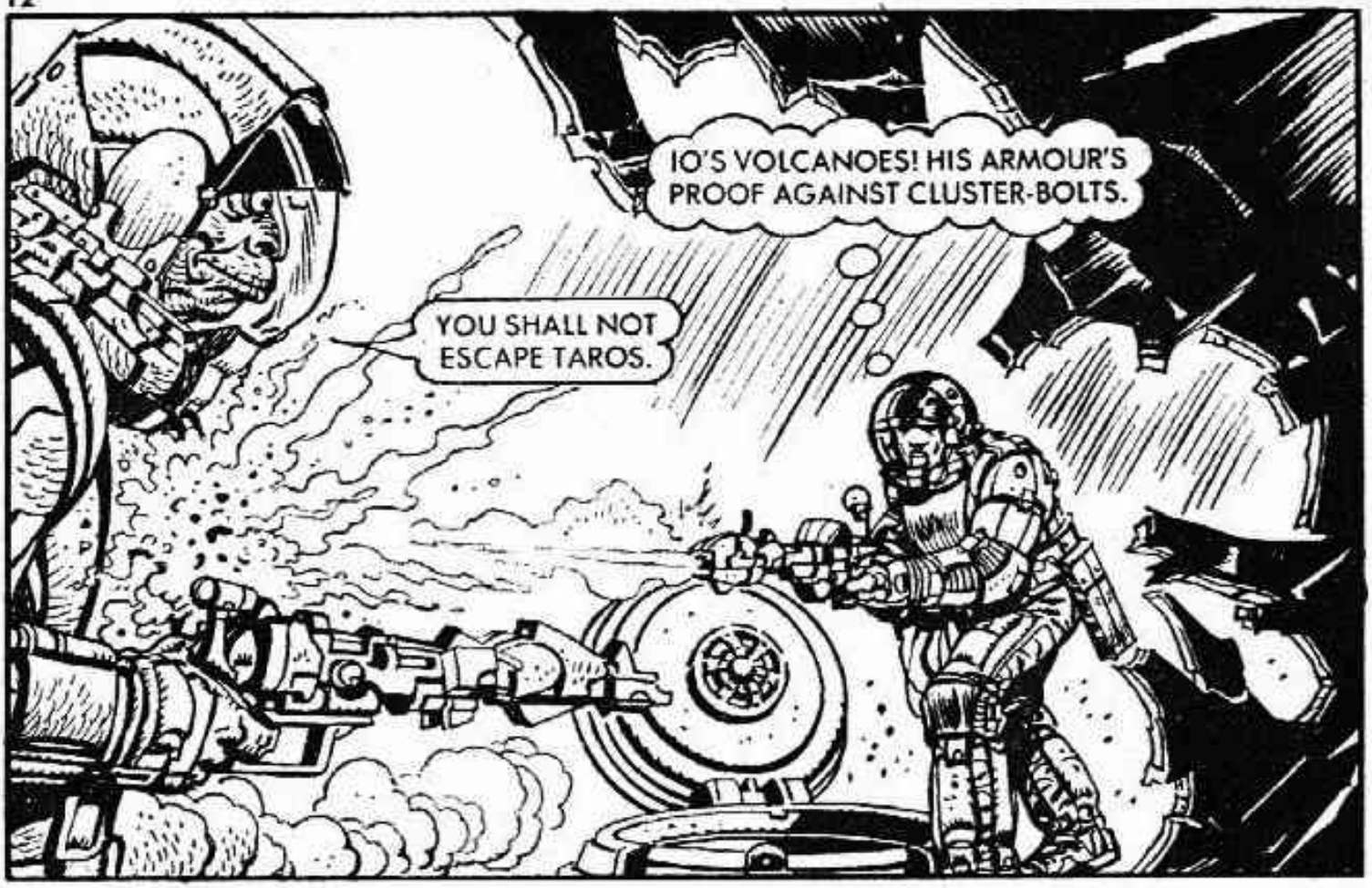
PLUTO'S SHADES, SOMETHING'S GOT THROUGH MY DEFENSIVE SCREEN!


IT'S CLAMPED ON. IT CAN'T BE EXPLOSIVE OR THE SCREENS WOULD HAVE BLOCKED IT.


A BOARDING PARTY! THEY'RE CUTTING THEIR WAY IN.

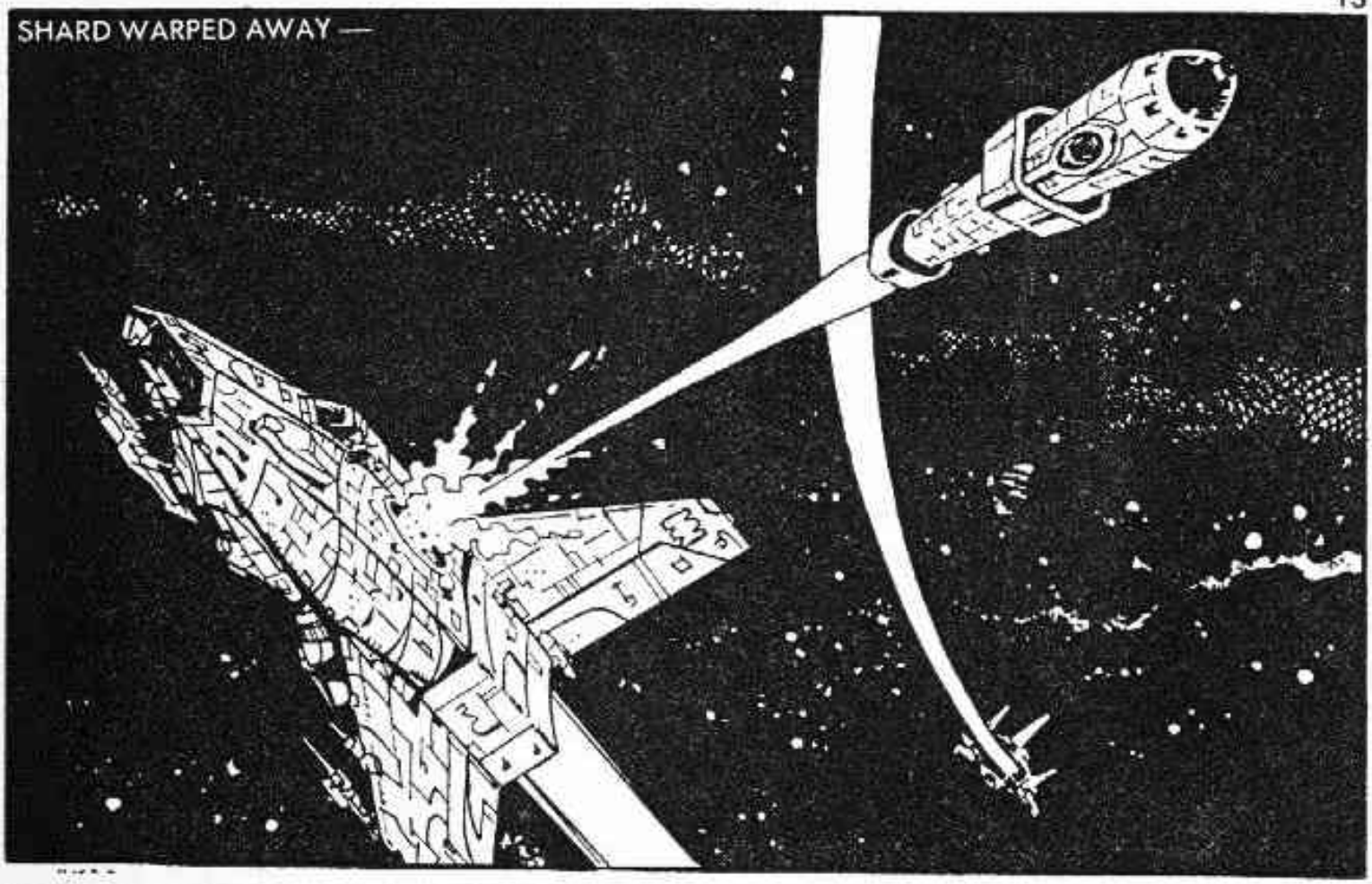
AN ARMOURED FIGURE BURST THROUGH THE WEAKENED BULKHEAD —
SURRENDER OR DIE, EARTHLING.

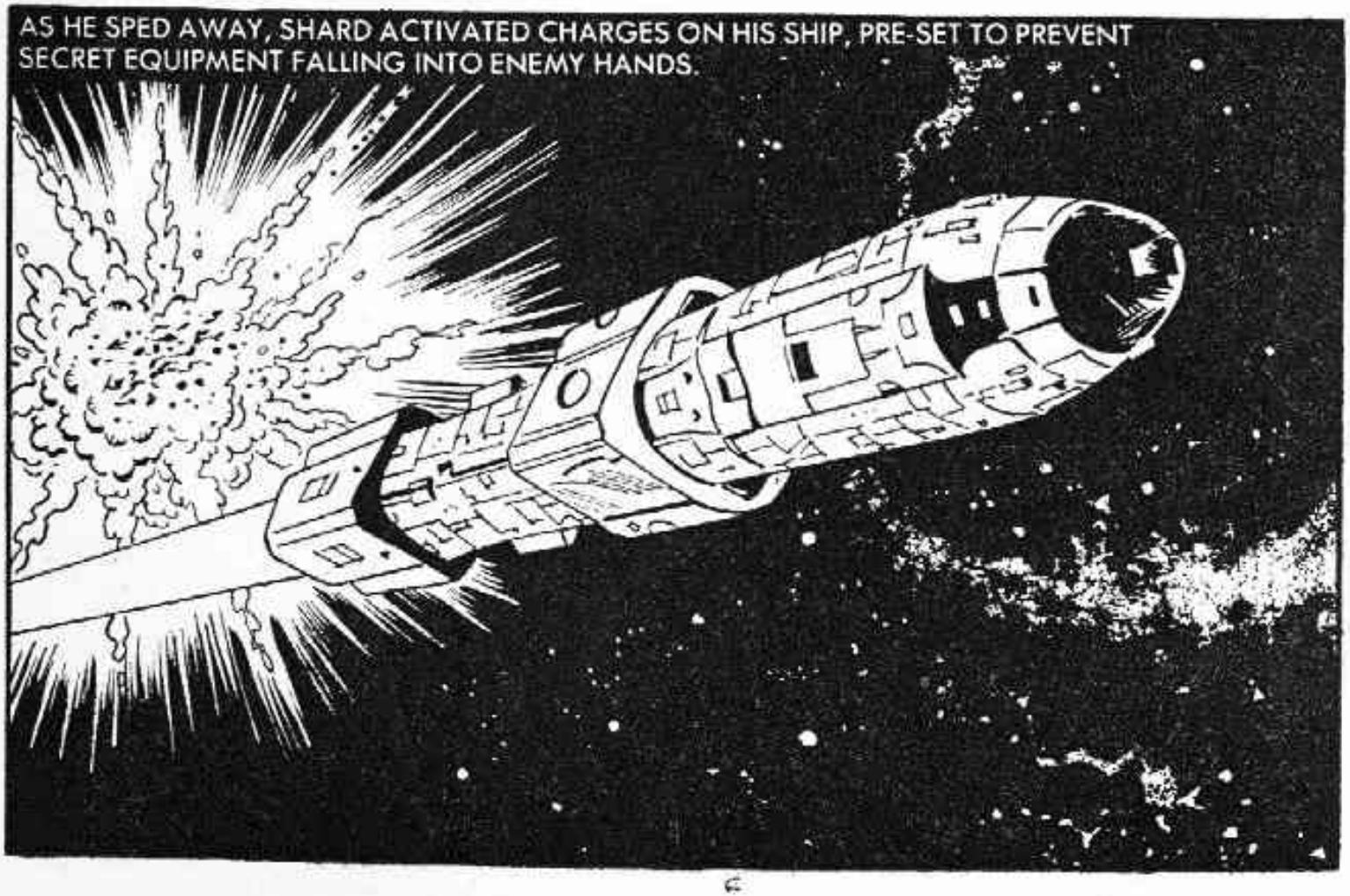
HERE'S MY ANSWER!


IO'S VOLCANOES! HIS ARMOUR'S PROOF AGAINST CLUSTER-BOLTS.
YOU SHALL NOT ESCAPE TAROS.

THIS SITUATION CALLS FOR A STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL.

SHARD RETREATED TO AN EJECT PORT —
HE'LL BURN THROUGH THE HATCH IN MINUTES, BUT THAT'S TIME ENOUGH FOR ME TO REACH THE LIFE-TC

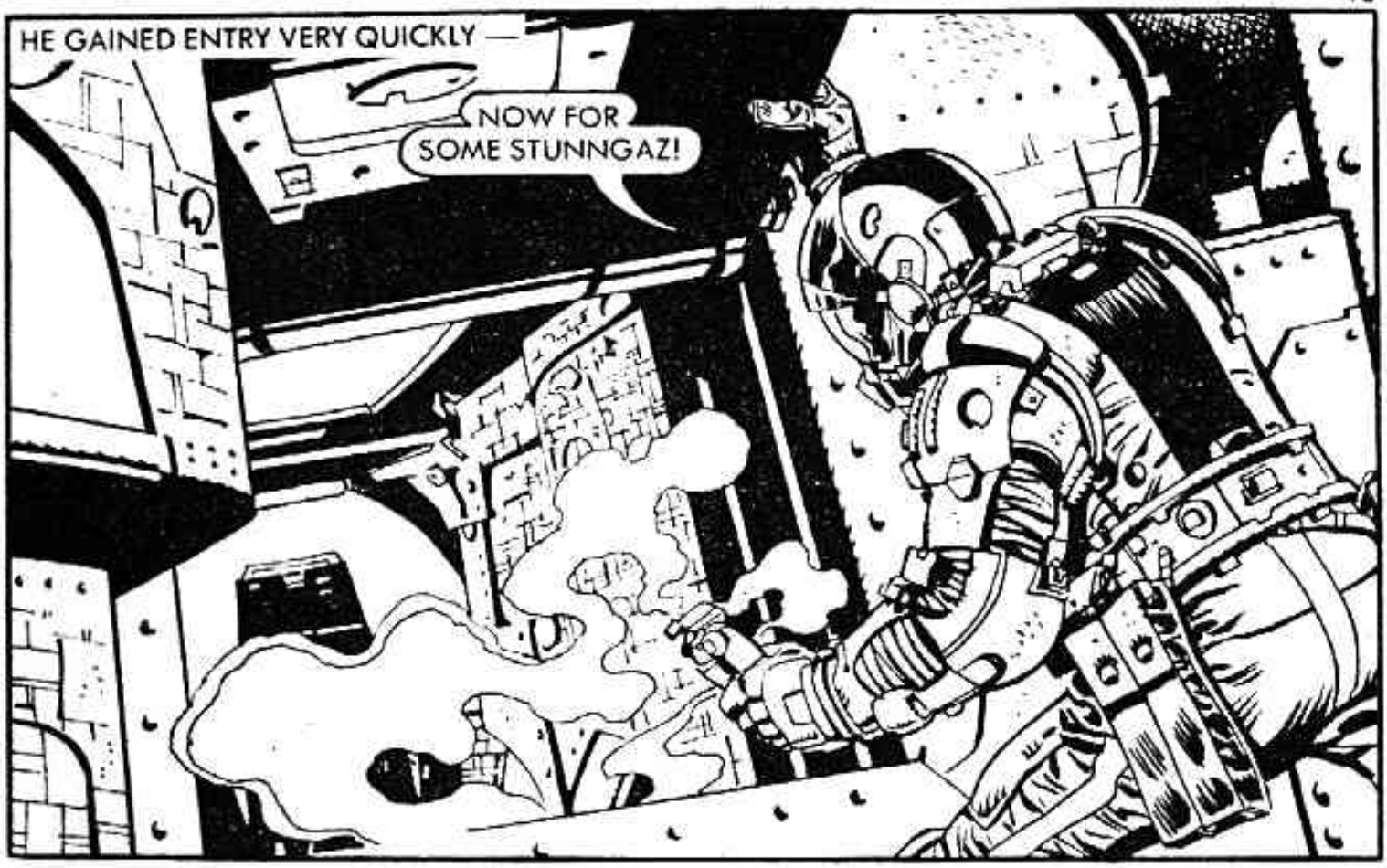

SHARD WARPED AWAY —


AS HE SPED AWAY, SHARD ACTIVATED CHARGES ON HIS SHIP, PRE-SET TO PREVENT SECRET EQUIPMENT FALLING INTO ENEMY HANDS.

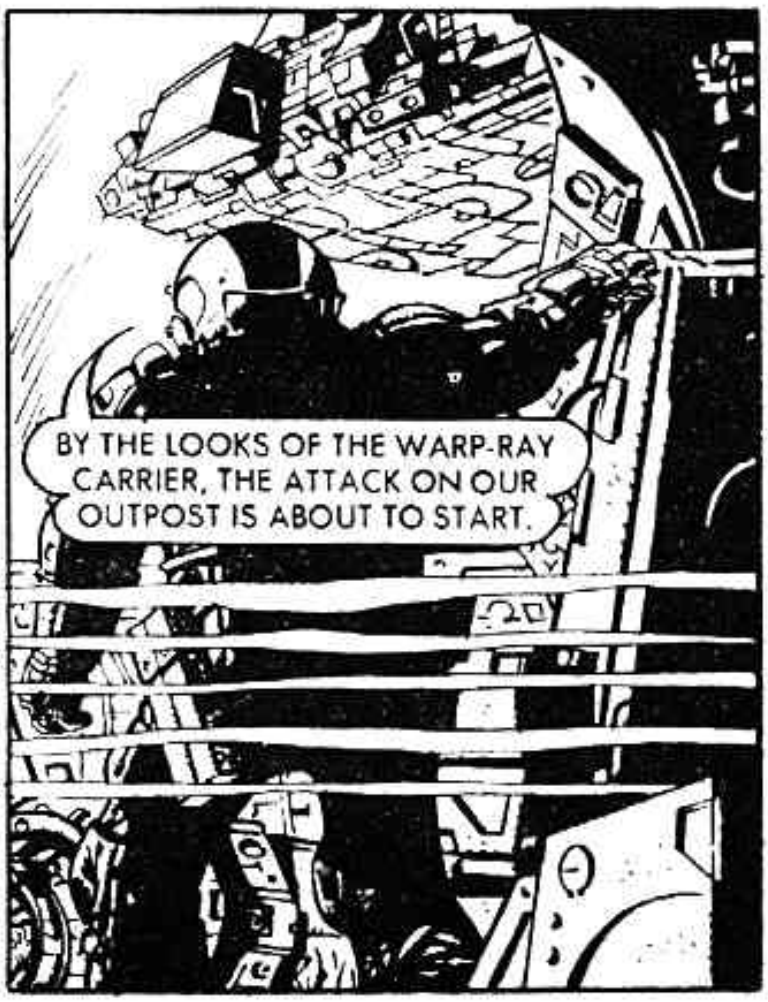
THE DISINTEGRATION WAS ALSO WITNESSED BY TAROS' CO-PILOT—
HOW FLIMSY THESE TERRAN SHIPS ARE! TAROS TEARS THEM APART SINGLE-HANDED.

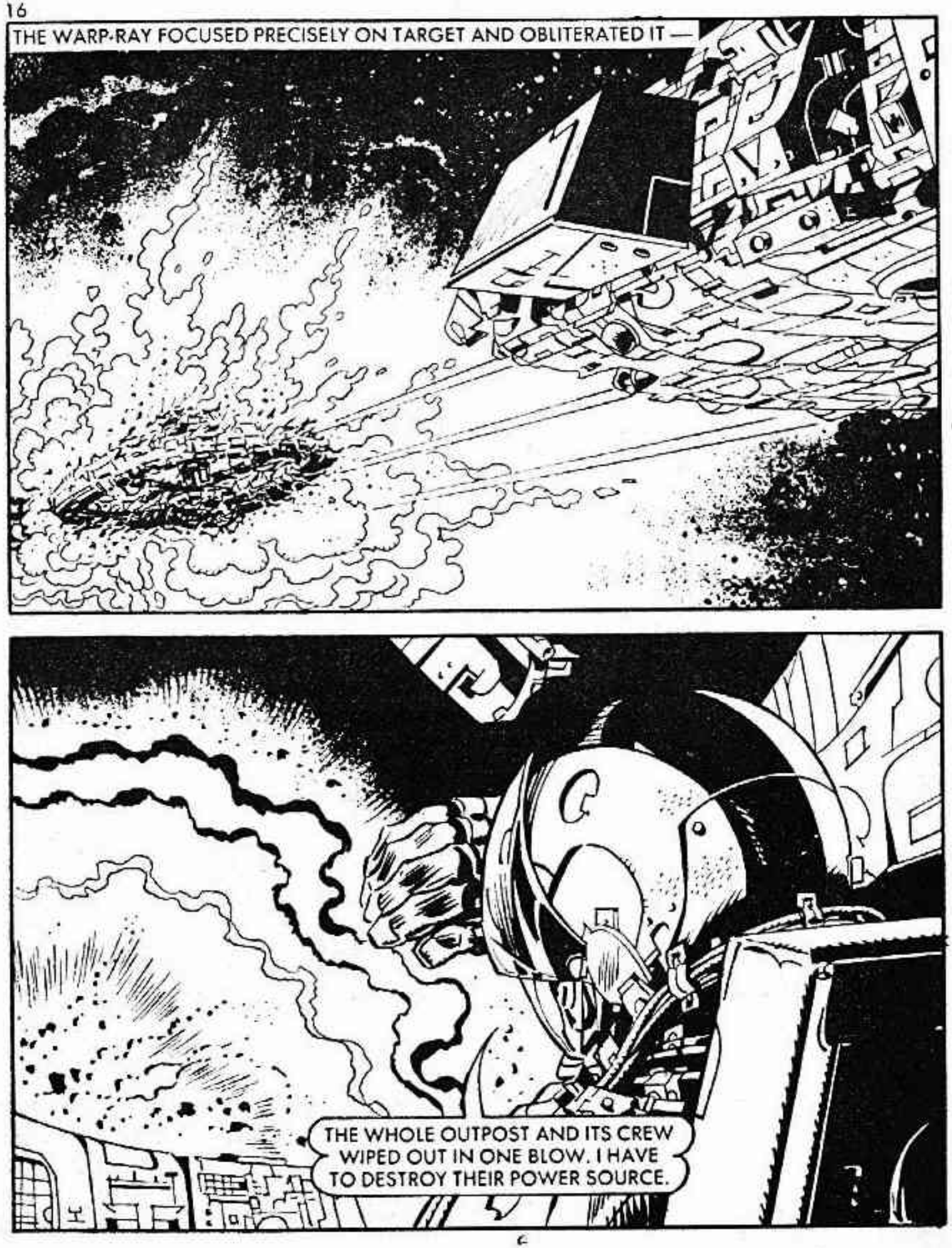
THE TERRAN CRAFT IS NOW NOTHING MORE THAN A MICRO-METEORITE SHOWER!

BUT THE RAIN OF DEBRIS MASKED THE ARRIVAL OF SHARD'S LIFE-TORP.


HE GAINED ENTRY VERY QUICKLY —
NOW FOR SOME STUNNGAZ!

THE ANTHROS PILOT HAD NO CHANCE OF REACHING HIS SPACE HELMET BEFORE THE GAS OVERCAME HIM.
THIS SHIP'S NOW UNDER MY COMMAND.


BY THE LOOKS OF THE WARP-RAY CARRIER, THE ATTACK ON OUR OUTPOST IS ABOUT TO START.


THE WARP-RAY FOCUSED PRECISELY ON TARGET AND OBLITERATED IT —
THE WHOLE OUTPOST AND ITS CREW WIPED OUT IN ONE BLOW. I HAVE TO DESTROY THEIR POWER SOURCE.

TERRAN SPACE AGENTS WERE TRAINED IN A WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF ENEMY SHIPS AND THEIR SYSTEMS. SHARD WAS ABLE TO PROGRAMME THE CONTROLS —
WHILE THOSE ANTHROS GHOULS ARE GLOATING OVER THEIR VICTIMS I'VE A CHANCE TO ACHIEVE A HYPER SPACE JUMP WITHOUT OPPOSITION.
JUMP SPEED ACHIEVED. THERE'S NO SYSTEM IN SPACE ABLE TO TRACK A SHIP IN THE HYPER-DIMENSION — I'M A FREE AGENT AGAIN!

THE SUDDEN DEPARTURE OF ONE OF THEIR FIGHTERS MYSTIFIED THE ANTHROS FLEET COMMANDER. A SEARCH PARTY PROBED THE WRECKAGE OF SHARD'S SHIP IN THE HOPE OF FINDING AN EXPLANATION.

THERE'S A BODY IN AN ANTHROS BATTLE-SUIT — IT MIGHT GIVE US THE CLUE TO WHAT HAPPENED HERE.

IT'S TAROS, THE WARRIOR, AND STILL ALIVE — JUST!

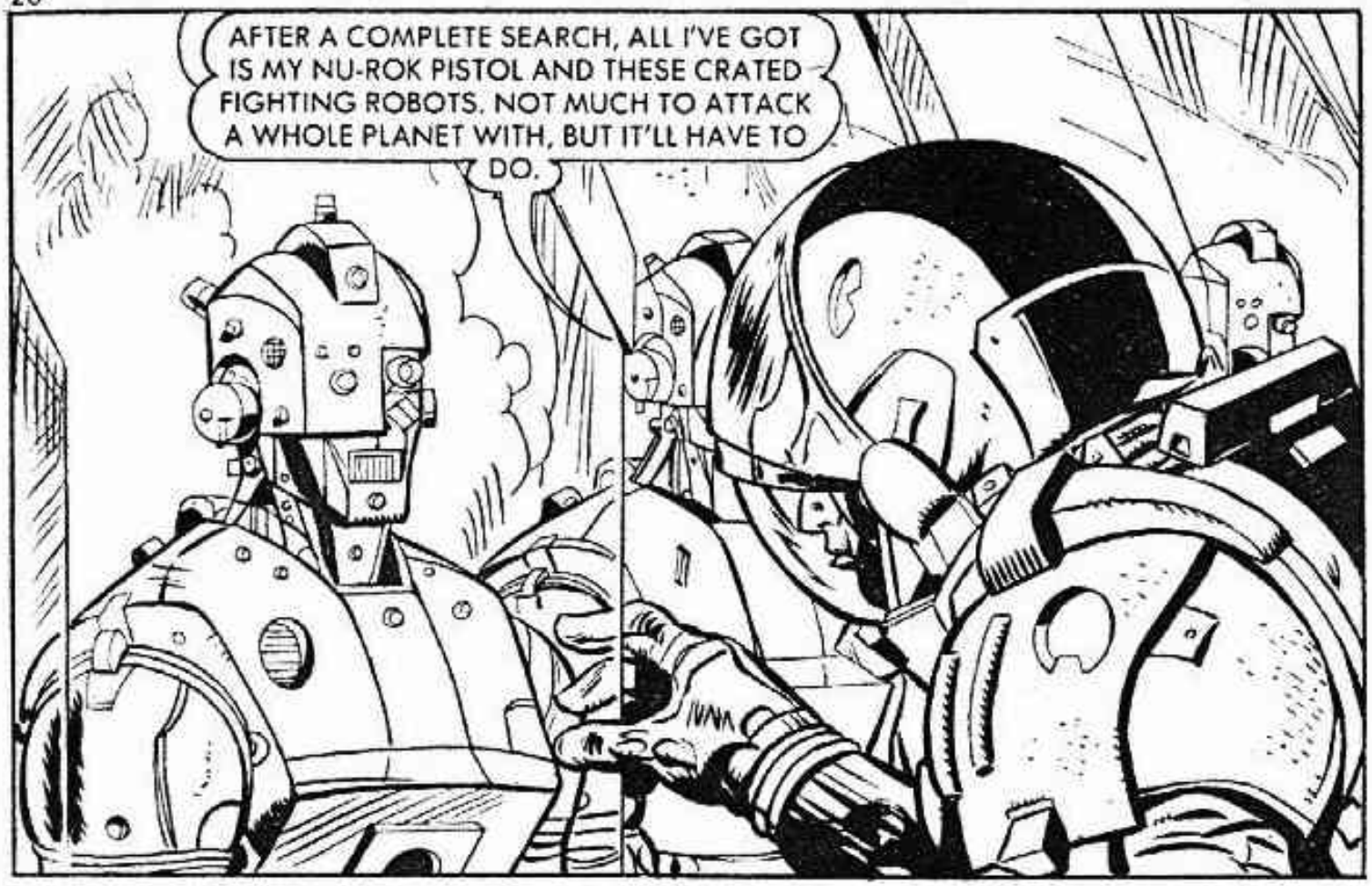
HE'S BADLY WOUNDED, BUT OUR INTENSIVE-MEDIC UNIT MAY BE ABLE TO SAVE PART OF HIM.

THE SHATTERED BODY OF PYRAX WAS PUT IN A SURVIVAL CELL TO BE PREPARED FOR BIONIC RECONSTRUCTION.

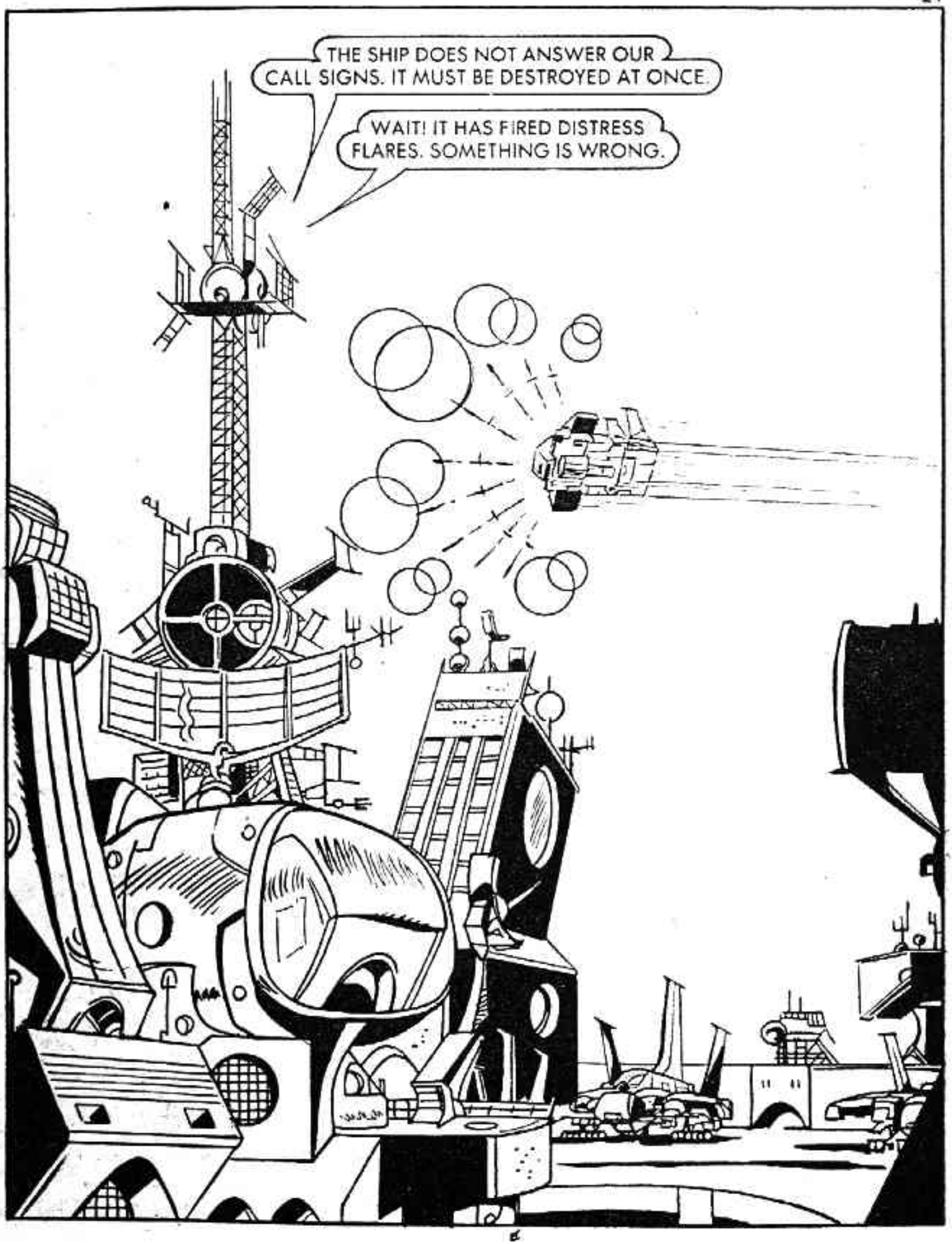
I WILL GAIN REVENGE ON THE FOUL TERRAN WHO CAUSED MY INJURIES.

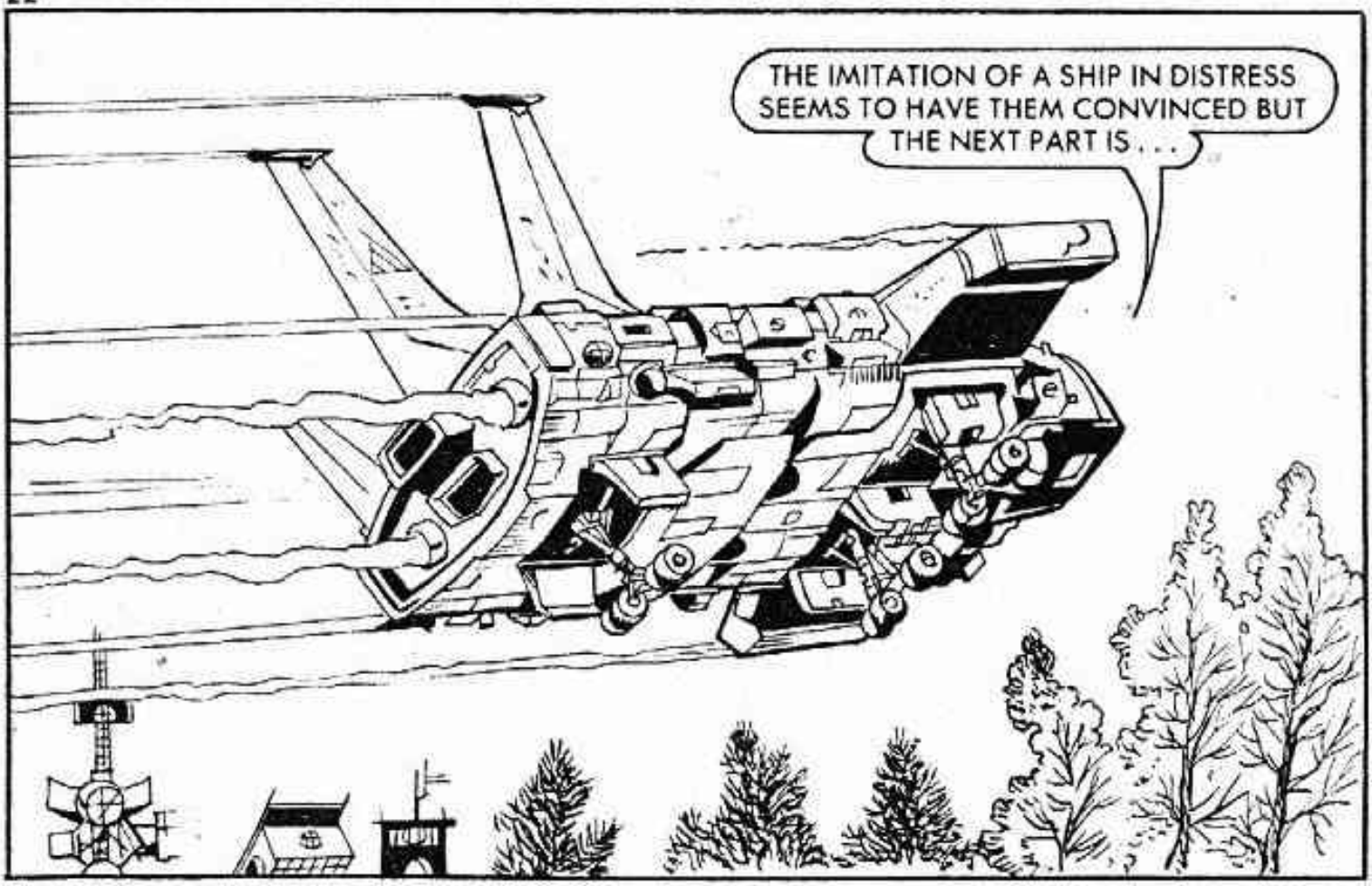
THE " FOUL TERRAN " IN QUESTION, WAS MEANWHILE PLANNING HIS NEXT MOVE AGAINST THE ANTHROS WAR MACHINE —

WITH ALL MY ORIGINAL WEAPONRY DESTROYED, I'VE GOT TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF WHATEVER'S ABOARD THIS SPACE-SHIP.


AFTER A COMPLETE SEARCH, ALL I'VE GOT IS MY NU-ROK PISTOL AND THESE CRATED FIGHTING ROBOTS. NOT MUCH TO ATTACK A WHOLE PLANET WITH, BUT IT'LL HAVE TO DO.

THE LOCATION OF THE ANTHROS COMMAND PLANET WAS KNOWN TO TERRAN INTELLIGENCE, BUT WELL-SHIELDED.
THE ONLY HOPE I HAVE IS TO FIND THE PREVIOUS AGENT — IF HE HASN'T BEEN EXECUTED.


THE SHIP DOES NOT ANSWER OUR CALL SIGNS. IT MUST BE DESTROYED AT ONCE.
WAIT! IT HAS FIRED DISTRESS FLARES. SOMETHING IS WRONG.


THE IMITATION OF A SHIP IN DISTRESS SEEMS TO HAVE THEM CONVINCED BUT THE NEXT PART IS . . .

. . . THE DIFFICULT PART!

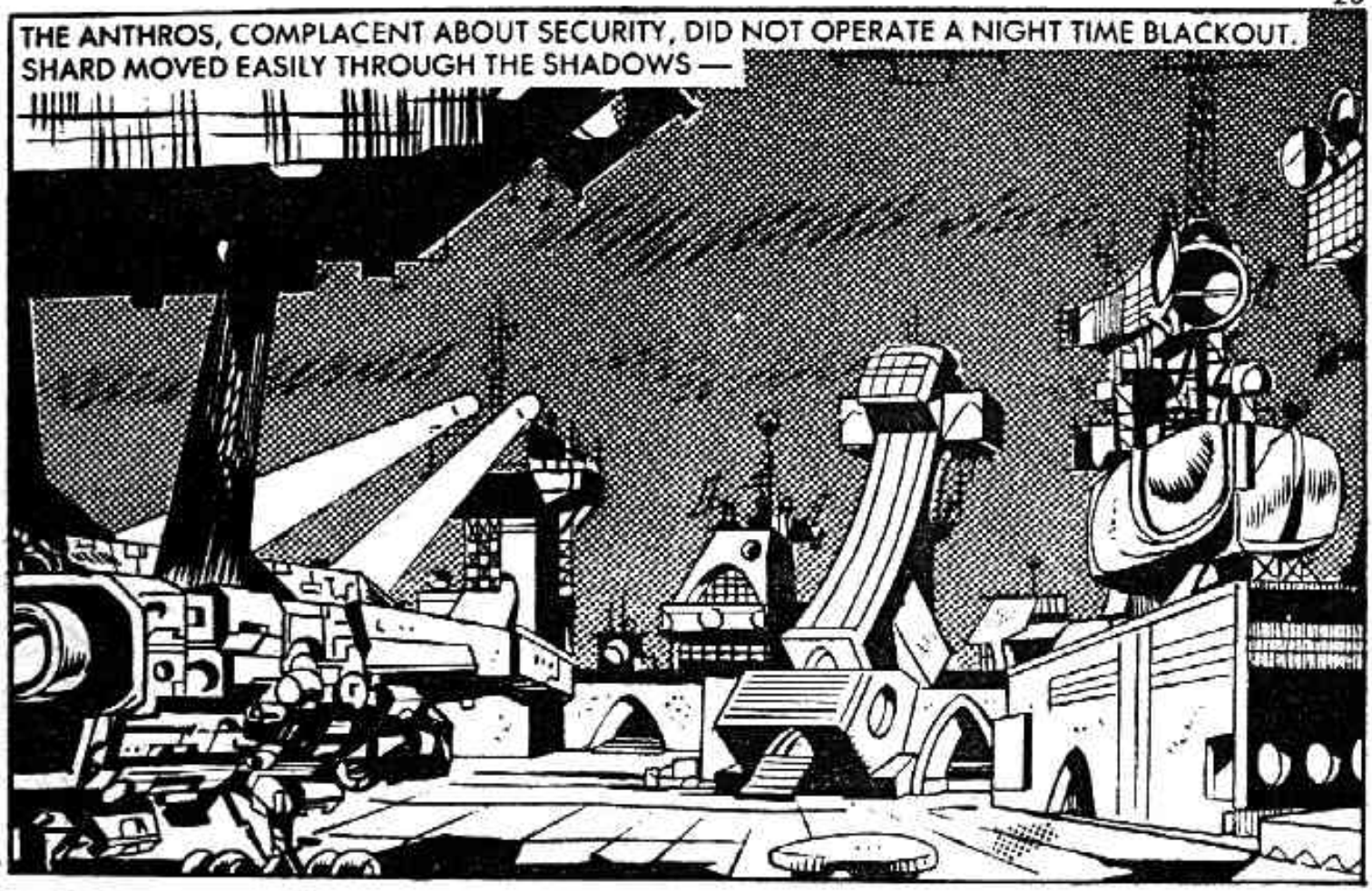
THE EMERGENCY SERVICES ARE ALREADY ON THEIR WAY — I'VE GOT ONLY SECONDS TO GO TO GROUND OUT OF SIGHT.

THEY'VE MISSED ME . . . I CAN SNEAK AWAY EASILY.

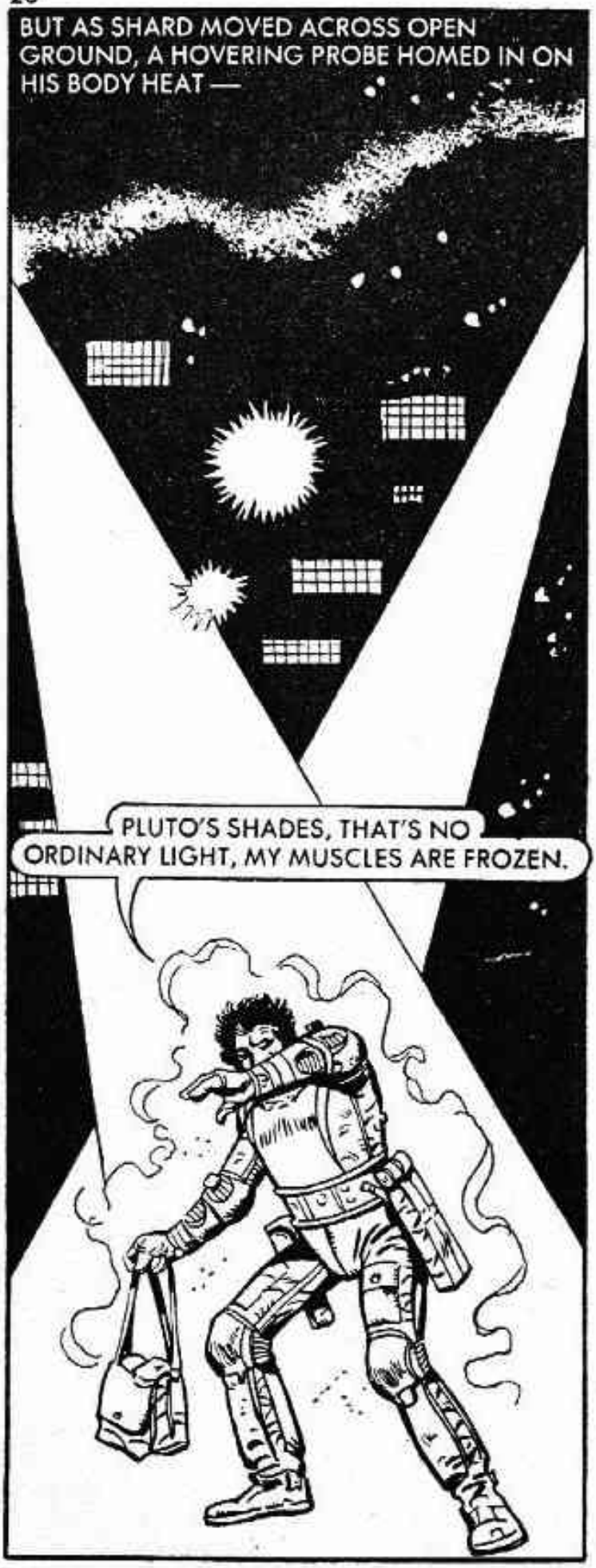
SHARD HAD PUT THE BODY OF THE CO-PILOT INTO THE FLIGHT SEAT —
THE PILOT'S DEAD, BUT WE'D BETTER GET HIM TO THE MEDUNIT FOR AN AUTOPSY.

ONCE IN THE MEDUNIT —
SOMETHING IS WRONG! THE SCANNER SAYS THAT HE HAS BEEN A LONG TIME DEAD.

ALSO IN THE MEDUNIT WAS PYRAX, RECOVERING FROM BIONIC SURGERY —
EVERYTHING IS SUSPICIOUS — THE TERRAN AGENT SHARD MUST BE CLOSE AT HAND.

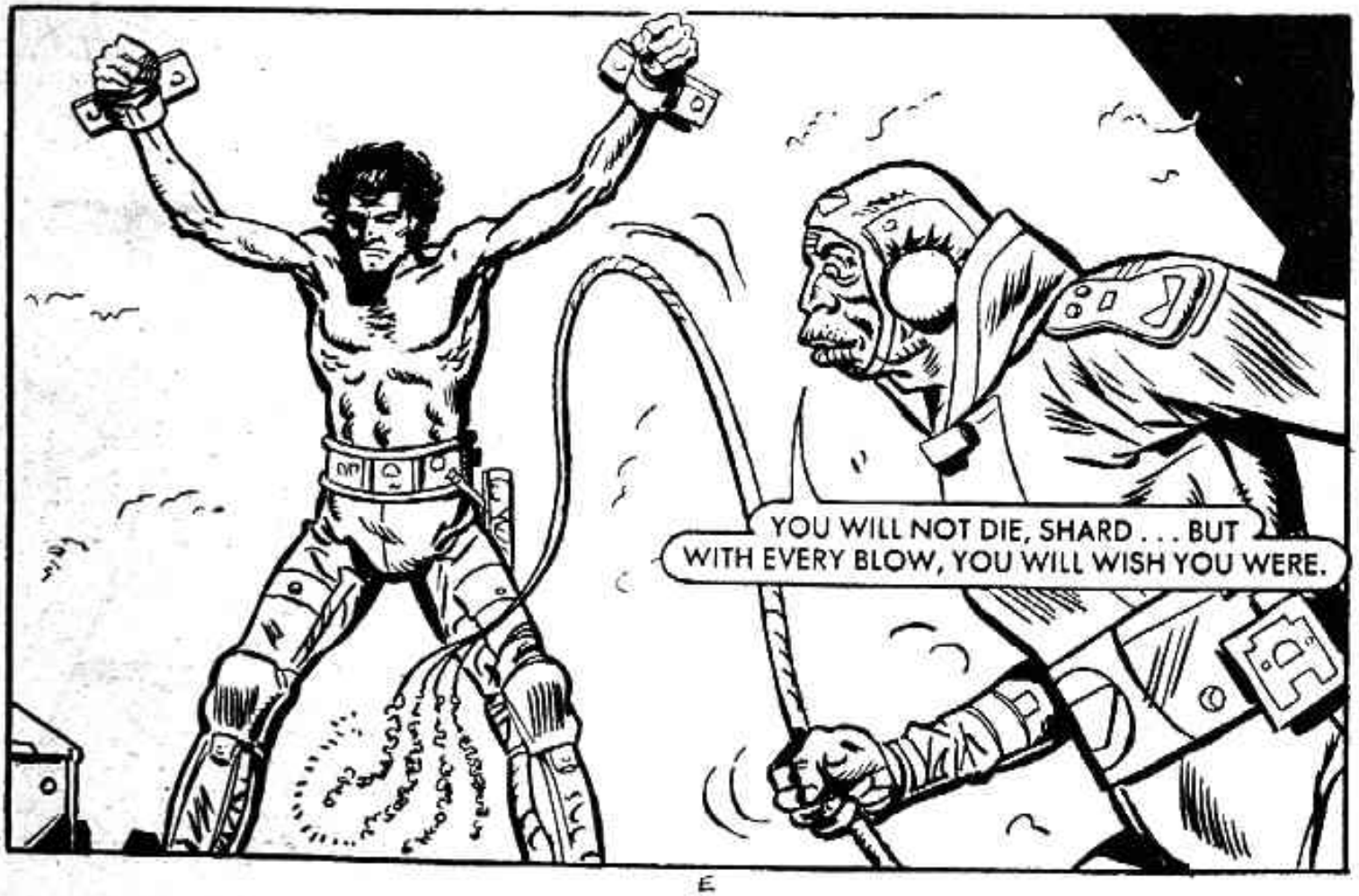

THE ANTHROS, COMPLACENT ABOUT SECURITY, DID NOT OPERATE A NIGHT TIME BLACKOUT. SHARD MOVED EASILY THROUGH THE SHADOWS —

I NEED TO HITCH A RIDE ON THEIR HOVORAIL TO GET TO THE CITY WHERE THE PRISONERS ARE LIKELY TO BE HELD.


BUT AS SHARD MOVED ACROSS OPEN GROUND, A HOVERING PROBE HOMED IN ON HIS BODY HEAT —
PLUTO'S SHADES, THAT'S NO ORDINARY LIGHT, MY MUSCLES ARE FROZEN.

THE FREEZE BEAM ALSO HAD TELE-PORT CAPABILITY AND SHARD MATERIALISED WITHIN THE ANTHROS BASE PUNISHMENT BLOCK.
WE MEET AGAIN, SHARD.

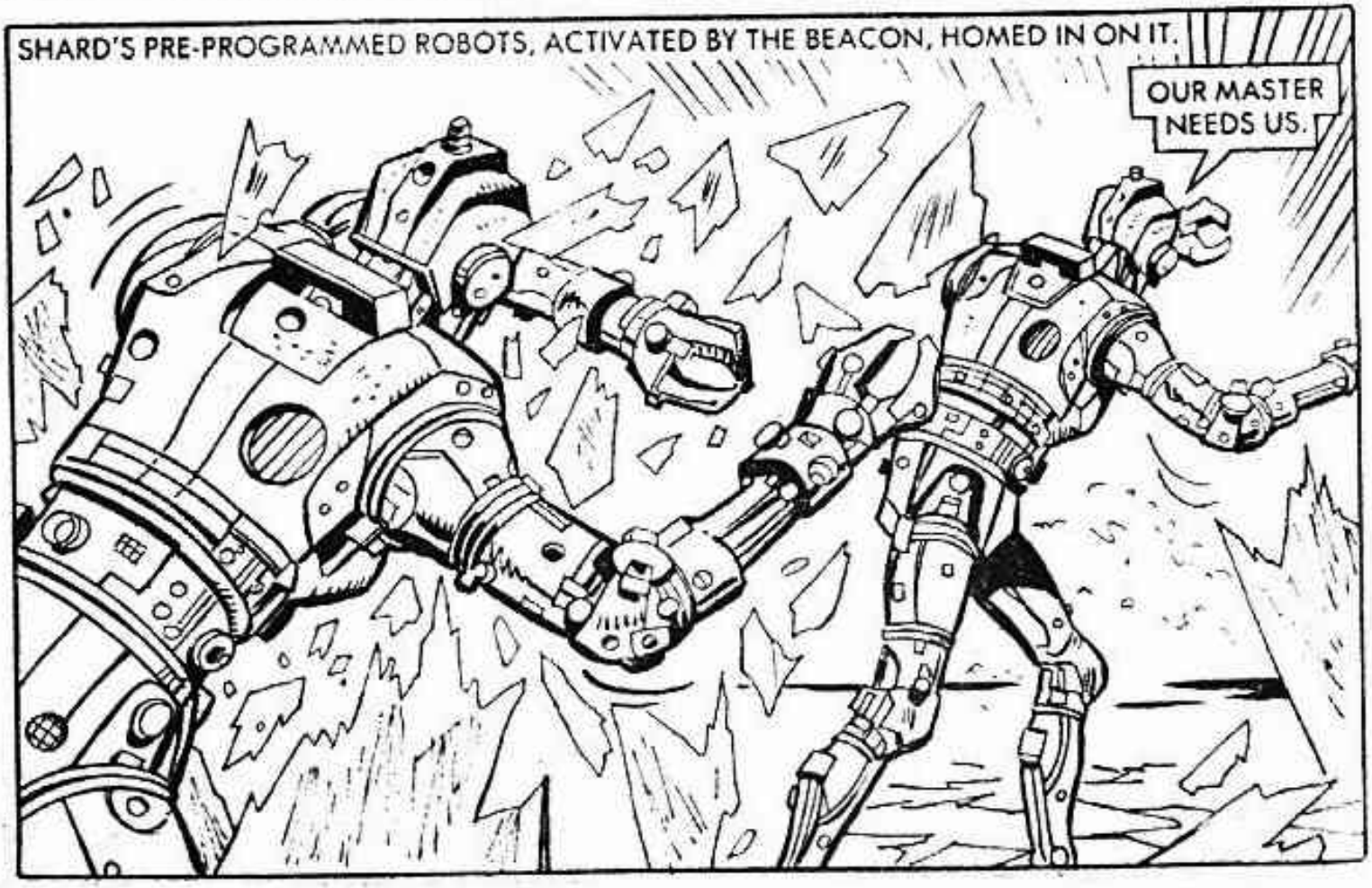
HE'S CLEAN OF WEAPONS, PYRAX! HE'S ALL YOURS!


YOU WILL NOT DIE, SHARD . . . BUT WITH EVERY BLOW, YOU WILL WISH YOU WERE.

E

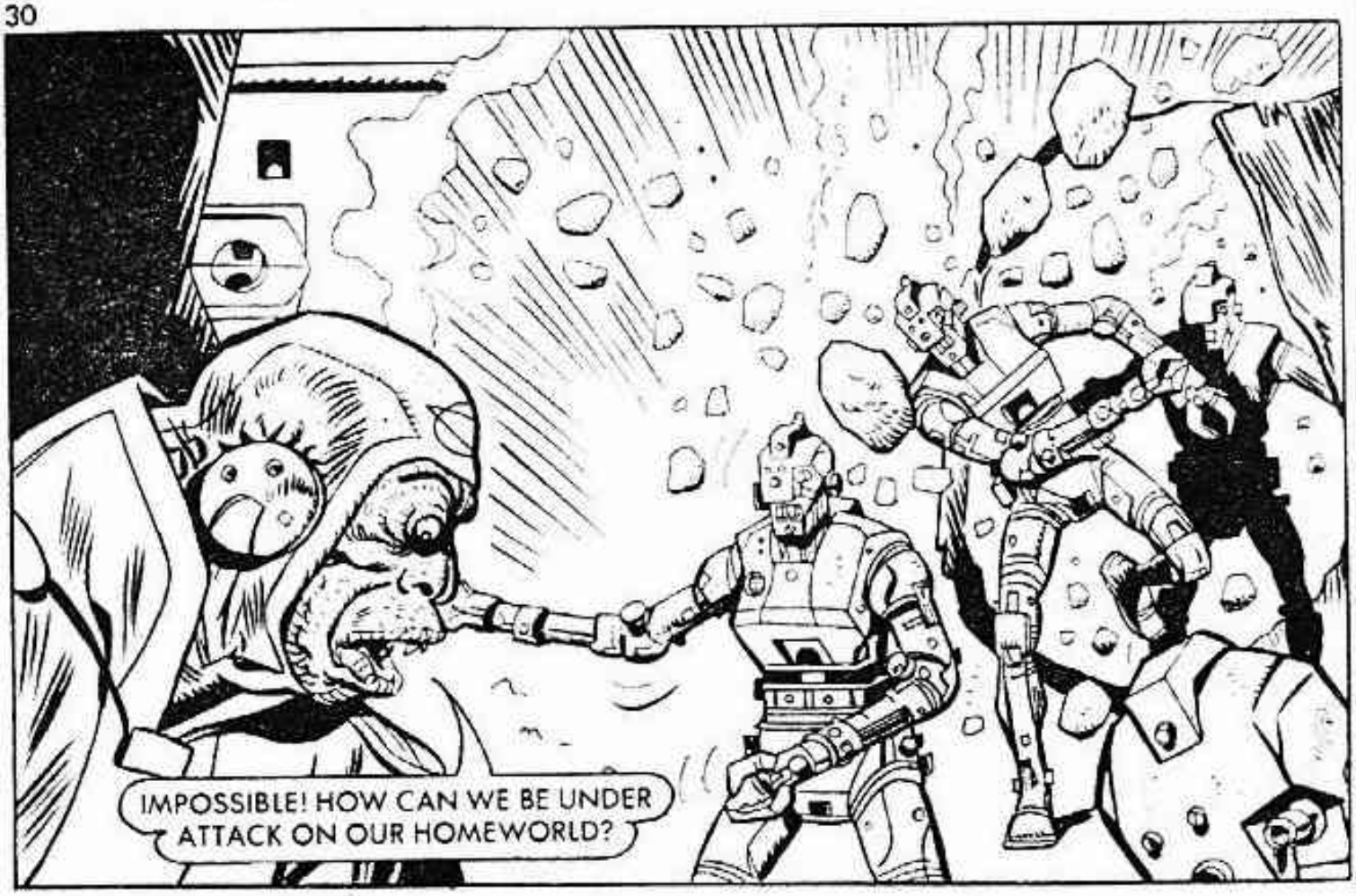
AAAAH . . . I WON'T LAST LONG WITH THIS LUNATIC.

BUT PYRAX HAD FAILED TO NOTICE THAT SHARD'S EMERGENCY BEACON WAS ACTIVATED . . .


SHARD'S PRE-PROGRAMMED ROBOTS, ACTIVATED BY THE BEACON, HOMED IN ON IT.
OUR MASTER NEEDS US.

IN THEIR SINGLE-MINDED OBEDIENCE TO THE CALL SIGNAL, THE ROBOTS CRUSHED ANYTHING OR ANYONE THAT GOT IN THEIR WAY. SHARD HAD PROGRAMMED THEM TO COME TO HIS AID WHENEVER THE CALL WAS MADE.

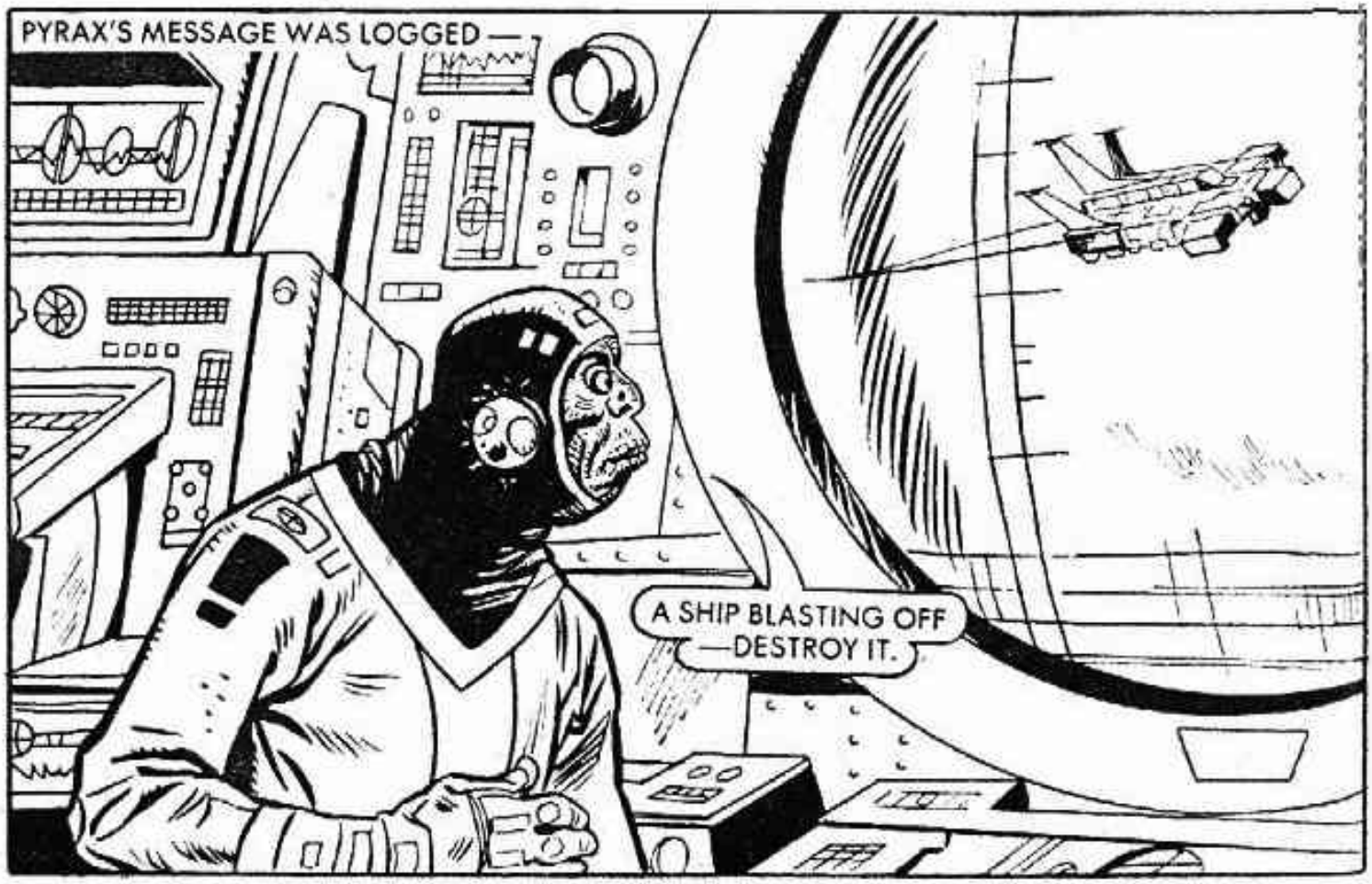
IN THE MEDUNIT —
YOUR SCREAMS ARE NOT LOUD ENOUGH FOR MY LIKING, LET'S SEE HOW YOU RESPOND TO AN INCREASED ELECTRO-CHARGE.


IMPOSSIBLE! HOW CAN WE BE UNDER ATTACK ON OUR HOMEWORLD?

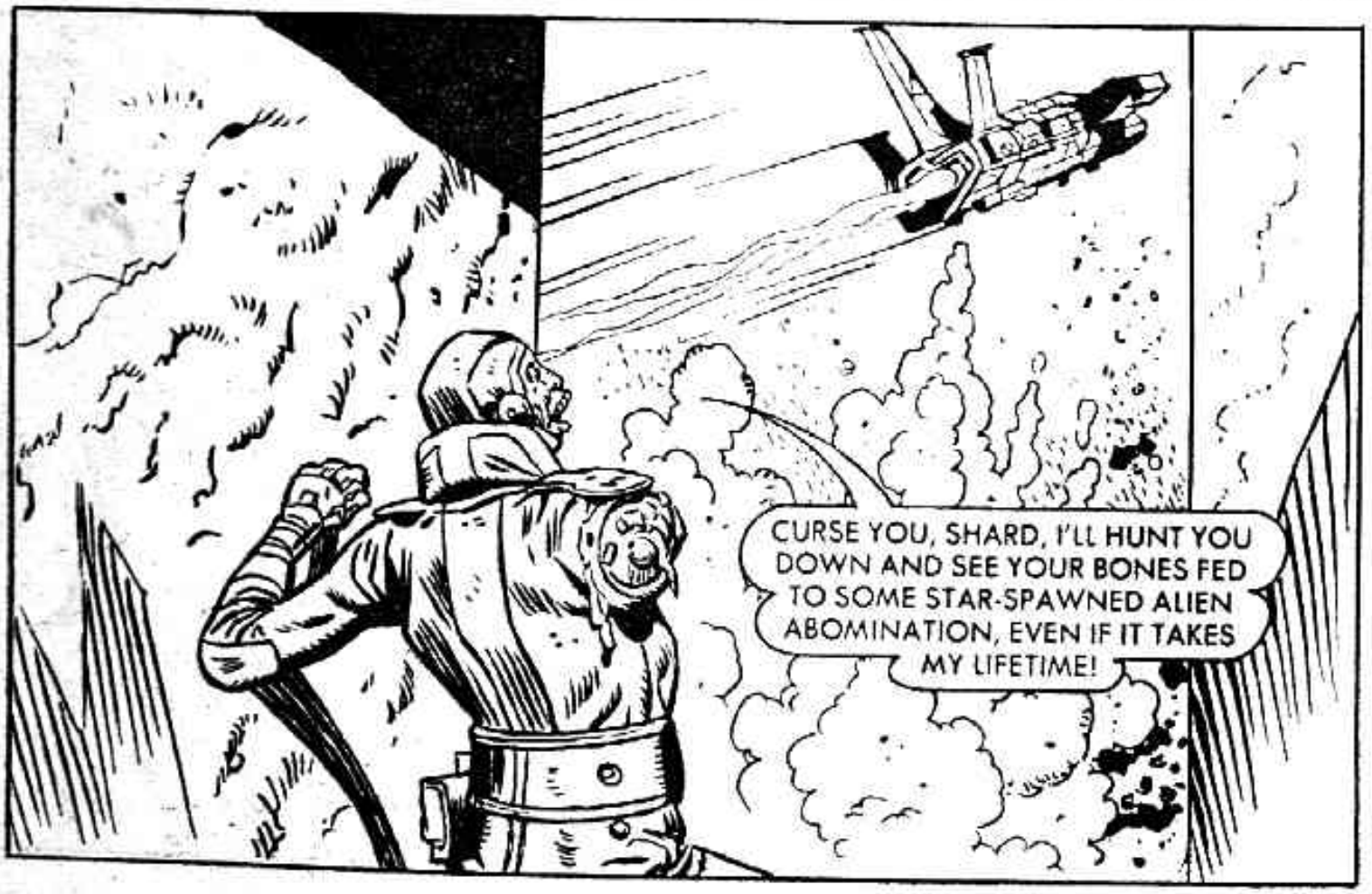
NO!!

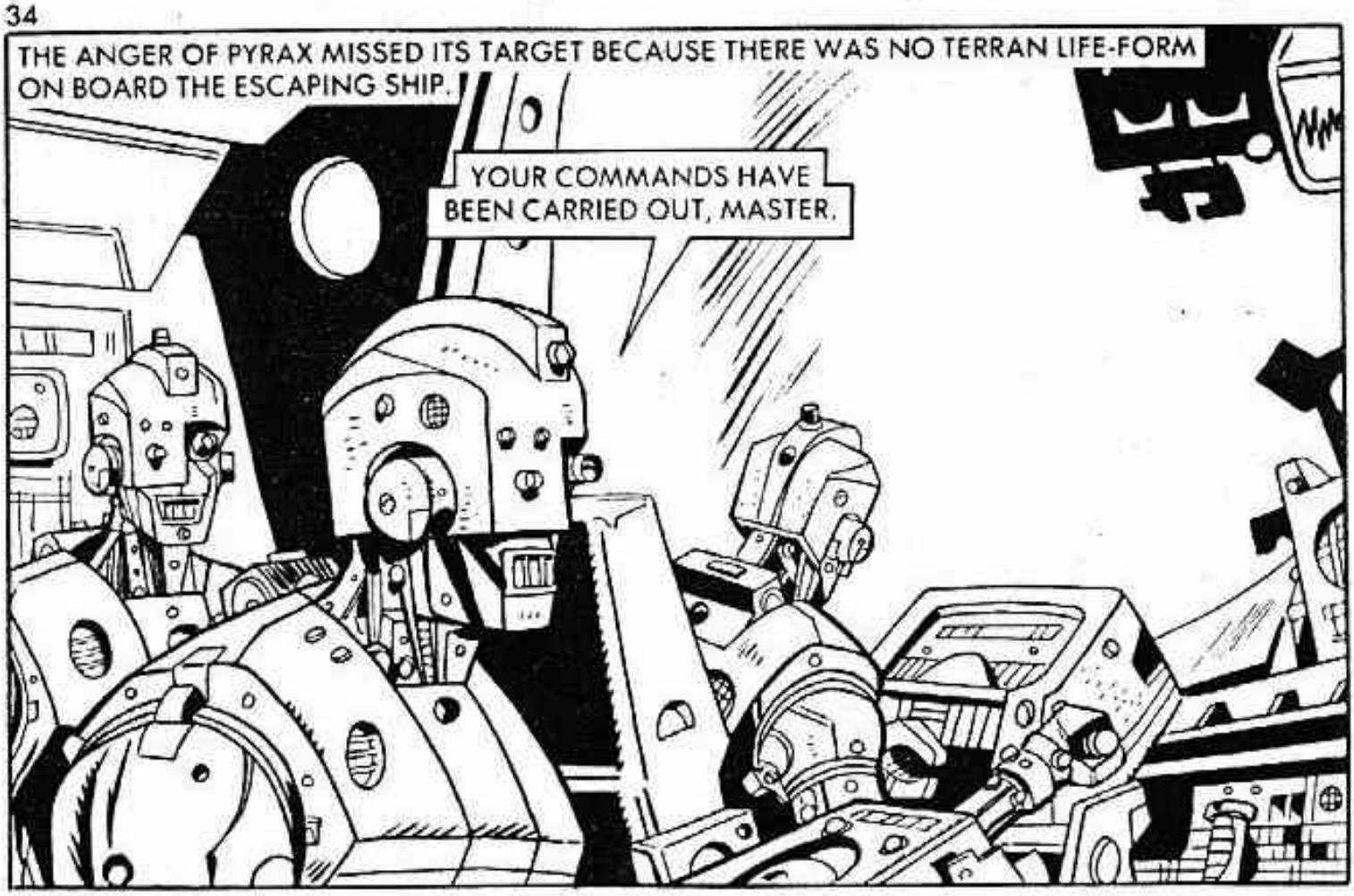
WHILE ONE ROBOT DISMANTLED PYRAX'S ARM, THE OTHER FREED SHARD.
FORGET HIM! GET A SPACE FIGHTER-SHIP. PRIORITY TWO PUT AS MUCH SPACE AS POSSIBLE BETWEEN US AND THIS BASE.

PYRAX WASTED NO TIME IN GETTING A MESSAGE THROUGH TO HIS CONTROL CENTRE.
PYRAX TO CONTROL; IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THE NEXT SHIP TO BLAST OFF IS DESTROYED.

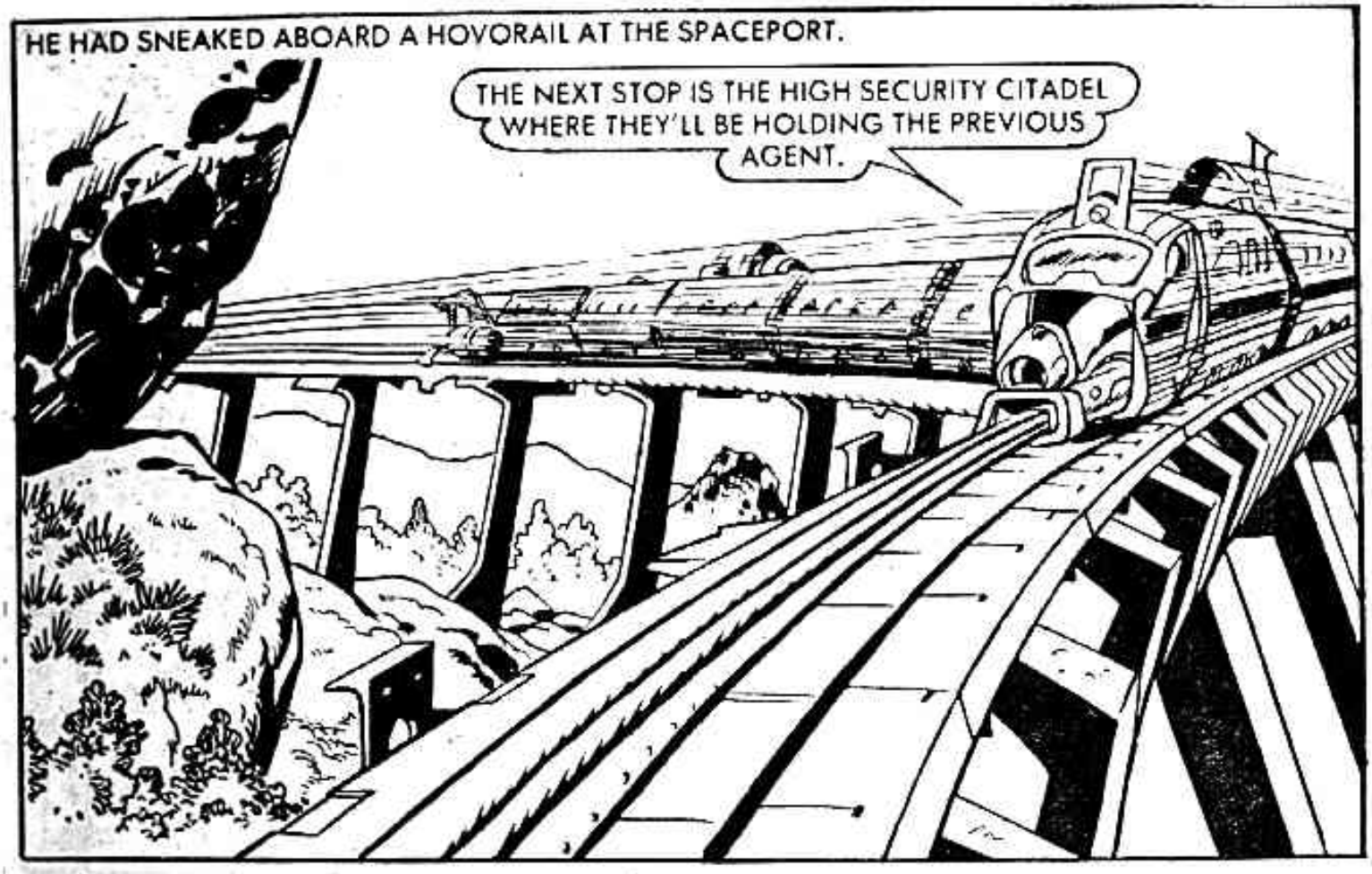

PYRAX'S MESSAGE WAS LOGGED —
A SHIP BLASTING OFF —DESTROY IT.

THE ANTHROS DUTY SQUADRON SCRAMBLED, BUT THEIR QUARRY DID THE UNEXPECTED AND TURNED AND SHATTERED THE PURSUIT BEFORE THEY EVEN GOT SPACE-BORNE.

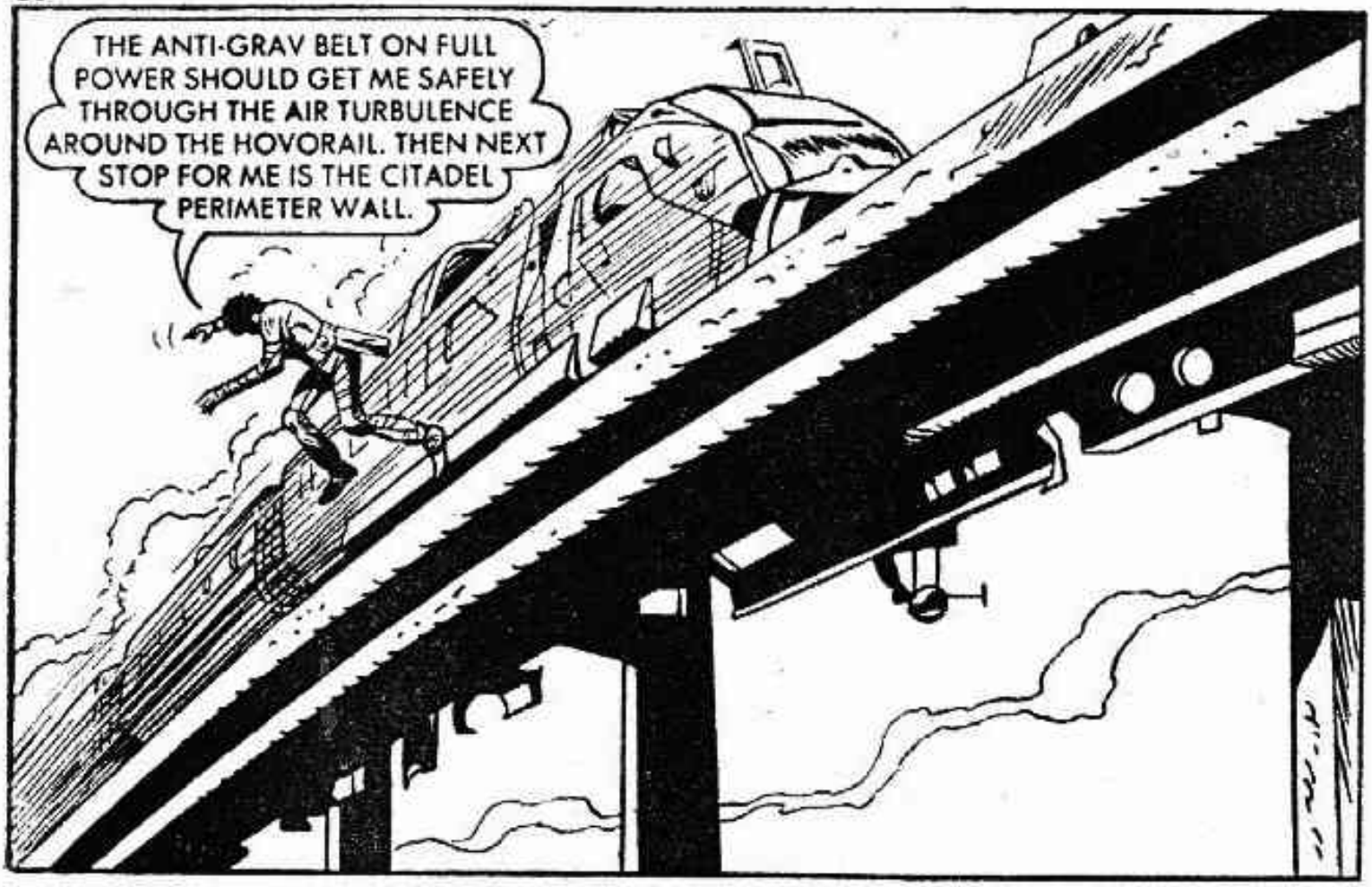

CURSE YOU, SHARD, I'LL HUNT YOU DOWN AND SEE YOUR BONES FED TO SOME STAR-SPAWNED ALIEN ABOMINATION, EVEN IF IT TAKES MY LIFETIME!

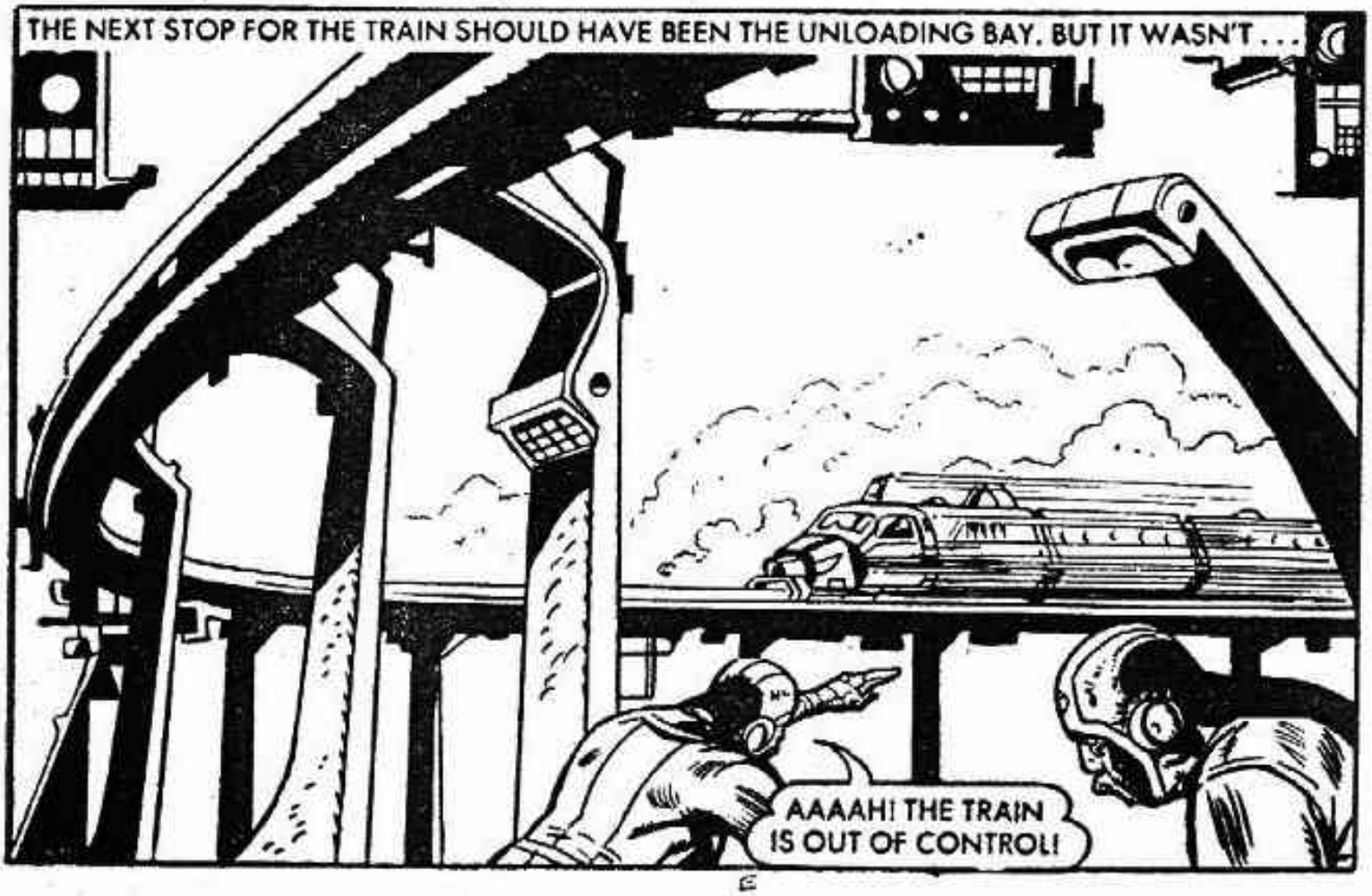

THE ANGER OF PYRAX MISSED ITS TARGET BECAUSE THERE WAS NO TERRAN LIFE-FORM ON BOARD THE ESCAPING SHIP.
YOUR COMMANDS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT, MASTER.

SHARD HAD STAYED ON THE ANTHROS COMMAND PLANET WHILE THE ROBOTS HAD CREATED A SUCCESSFUL " ESCAPE ".
OKAY, ROBOTS. KEEP OUT OF HARM'S WAY AND KEEP LISTENING OUT FOR THE CALL WHEN I NEED YOU AGAIN, MESSAGE ENDS.


HE HAD SNEAKED ABOARD A HOVORAIL AT THE SPACEPORT.
THE NEXT STOP IS THE HIGH SECURITY CITADEL WHERE THEY'LL BE HOLDING THE PREVIOUS AGENT.

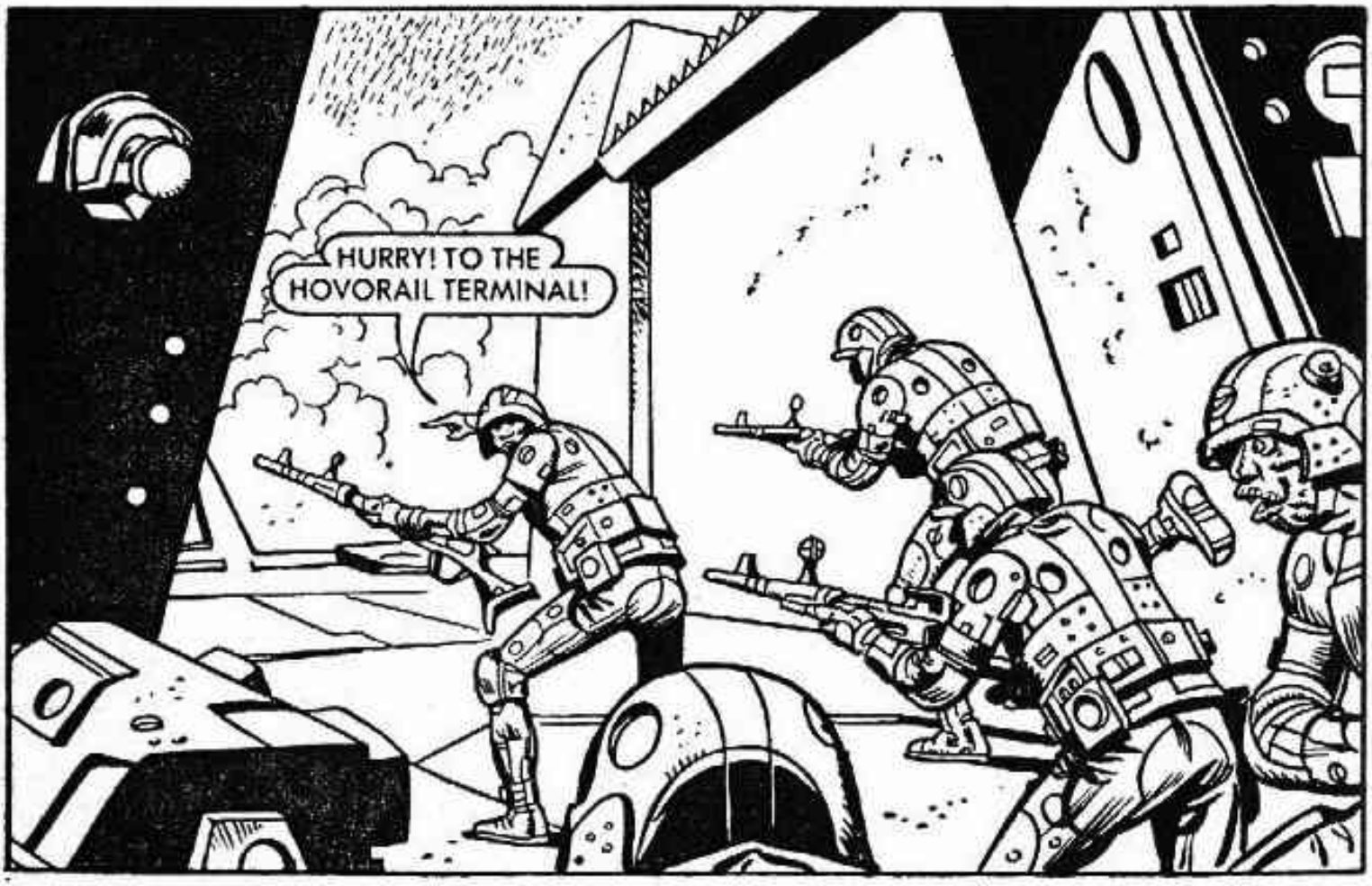
THE HOVORAIL TRAIN WAS COMPLETELY COMPUTER CONTROLLED.
A QUICK LOCALISED BURN TAKES OUT THE BRAKING SYSTEM. WHATEVER THE ANTHROS USE FOR BUFFERS AT THE END OF THE LINE, IS GOING TO LOOK VERY MESSY MINUTES FROM NOW.

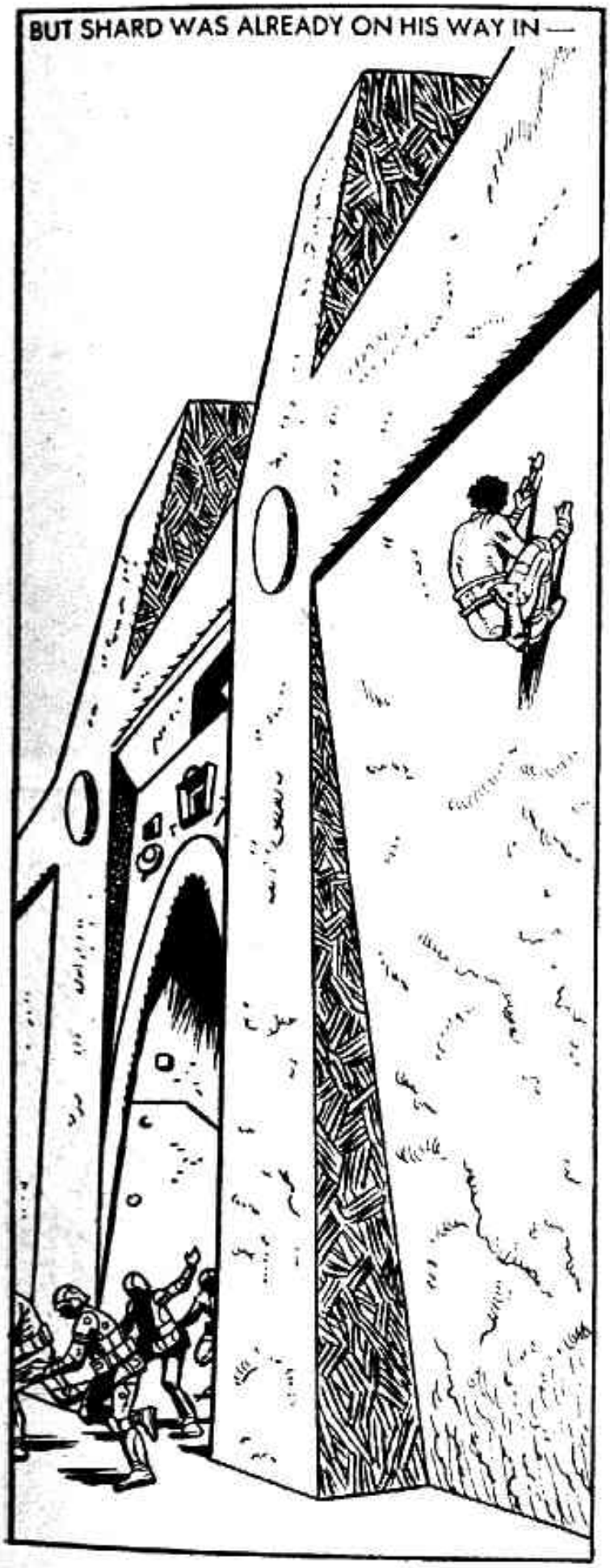

THE ANTI-GRAV BELT ON FULL POWER SHOULD GET ME SAFELY THROUGH THE AIR TURBULENCE AROUND THE HOVORAIL. THEN NEXT STOP FOR ME IS THE CITADEL PERIMETER WALL.


THE NEXT STOP FOR THE TRAIN SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE UNLOADING BAY. BUT IT WASN'T . . .
AAAAH! THE TRAIN IS OUT OF CONTROL!

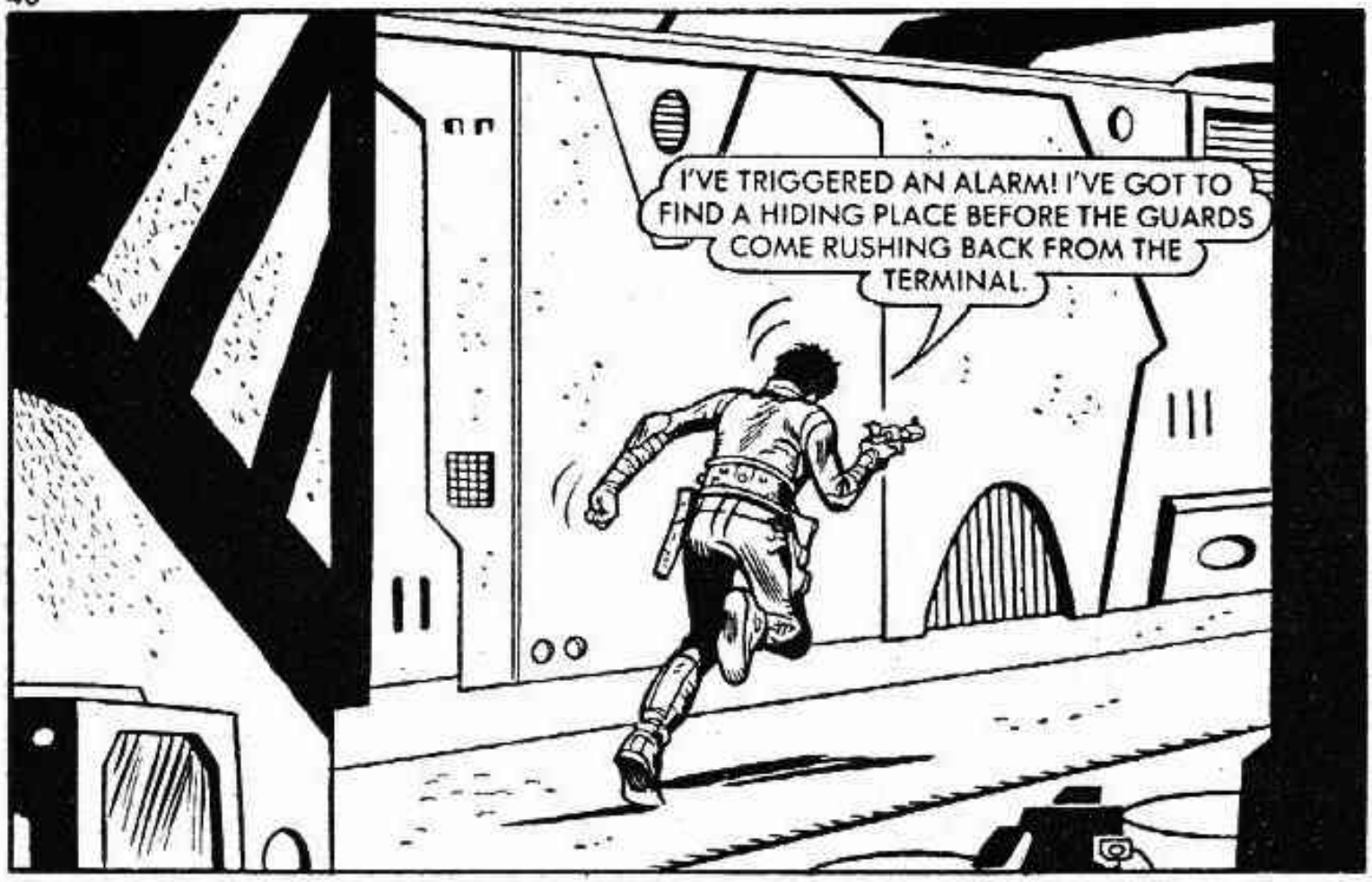
THE HOVORAIL PLOUGHED INTO THE DISEMBARKATION POINT —

ALERT THE CITADEL GUARDS.


HURRY! TO THE HOVORAIL TERMINAL!

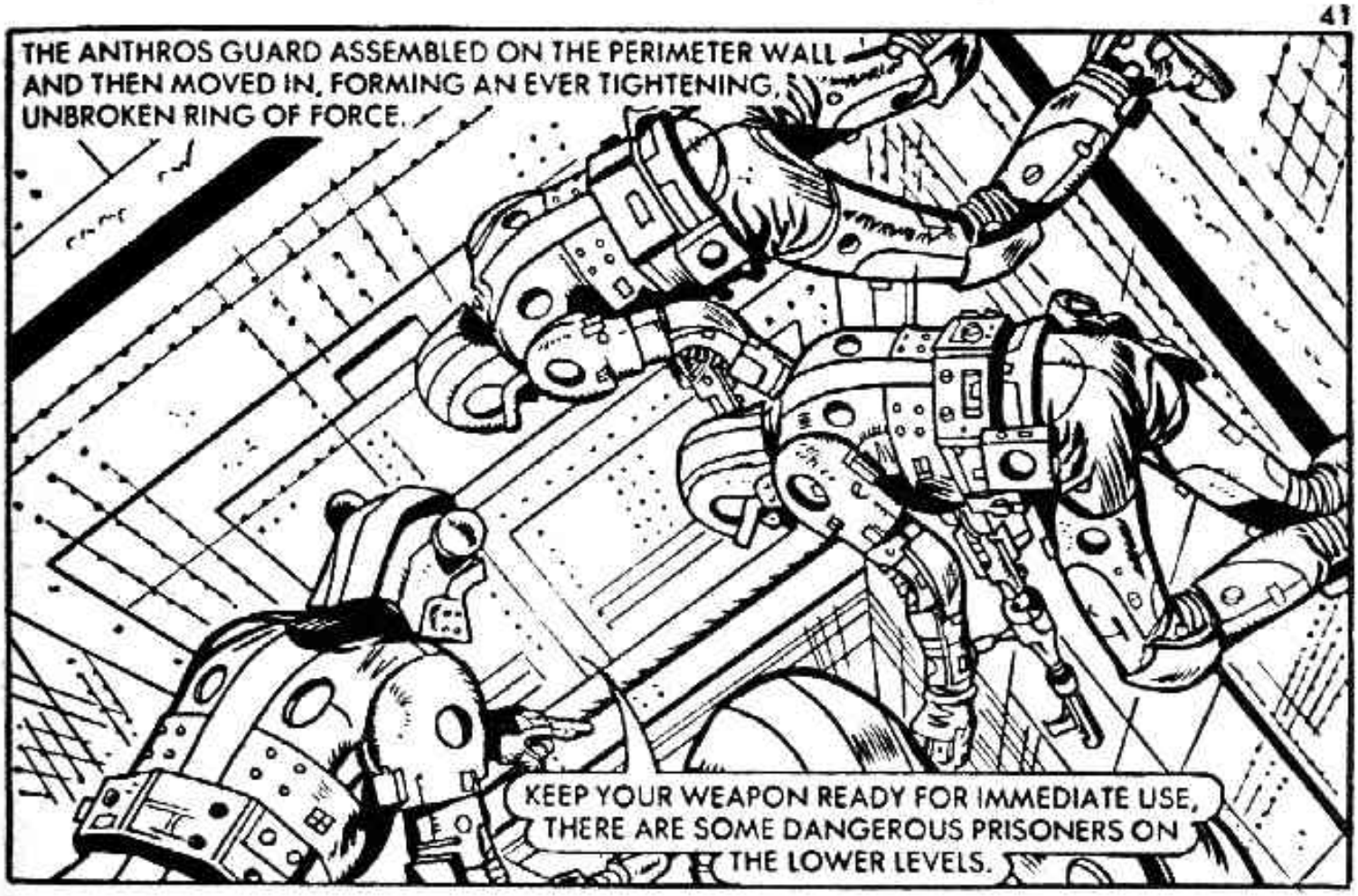

BUT SHARD WAS ALREADY ON HIS WAY IN —

ALL THE SECURITY SYSTEMS ARE DESIGNED TO KEEP PEOPLE INSIDE THE PRISON, THEY'RE EASY TARGETS FOR SOMEONE BREAKING IN FROM OUTSIDE.


I'VE TRIGGERED AN ALARM! I'VE GOT TO FIND A HIDING PLACE BEFORE THE GUARDS COME RUSHING BACK FROM THE TERMINAL.

MY GUESS IS THAT THE TOP-SECURITY CELLS WILL BE IN THE BASEMENT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE DEEPEST GRAVITY WELL CORRIDOR.

MEANWHILE, THE CAPTAIN OF THE CITADEL GUARD RESPONDED TO THE MYSTERIOUS ALARM.
I CAN'T BELIEVE TWO SYSTEMS MALFUNCTION IN ONE DAY. I WANT THE CITADEL SEARCHED FROM PERIMETER TO CORE AND EVERY PRISONER COUNTED.


THE ANTHROS GUARD ASSEMBLED ON THE PERIMETER WALL AND THEN MOVED IN, FORMING AN EVER TIGHTENING, UNBROKEN RING OF FORCE.
KEEP YOUR WEAPON READY FOR IMMEDIATE USE, THERE ARE SOME DANGEROUS PRISONERS ON THE LOWER LEVELS.

ALL PRISONERS SECURE.

USING A MOLECULE DISTORTER, SHARD HAD SQUEEZED THROUGH THE BARS OF HIS FELLOW AGENT'S CELL —

ALL CLEAR, SHARD! THEY'VE GONE ON TO THE NEXT CELL BLOCK.

GOOD, KRIS. I KNEW THE ANTHROS WOULDN'T LOOK ANY FURTHER, ONCE THEY'VE SEEN WHAT THEY WERE EXPECTING TO SEE.

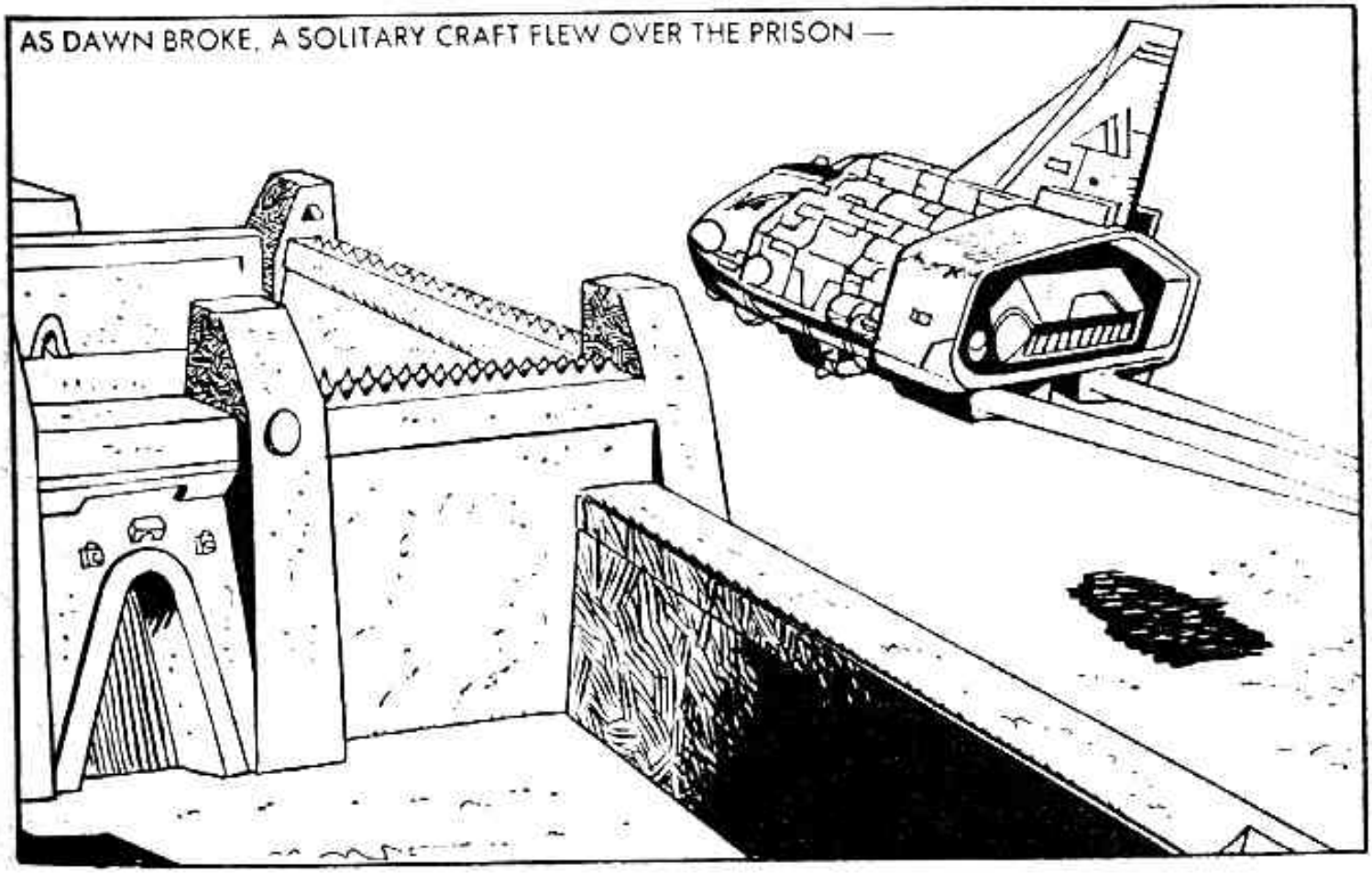
SHARD AND THE CAPTIVE AGENT POOLED THEIR KNOWLEDGE ON THE LOCATION OF THE WARP-RAY POWER SOURCE.

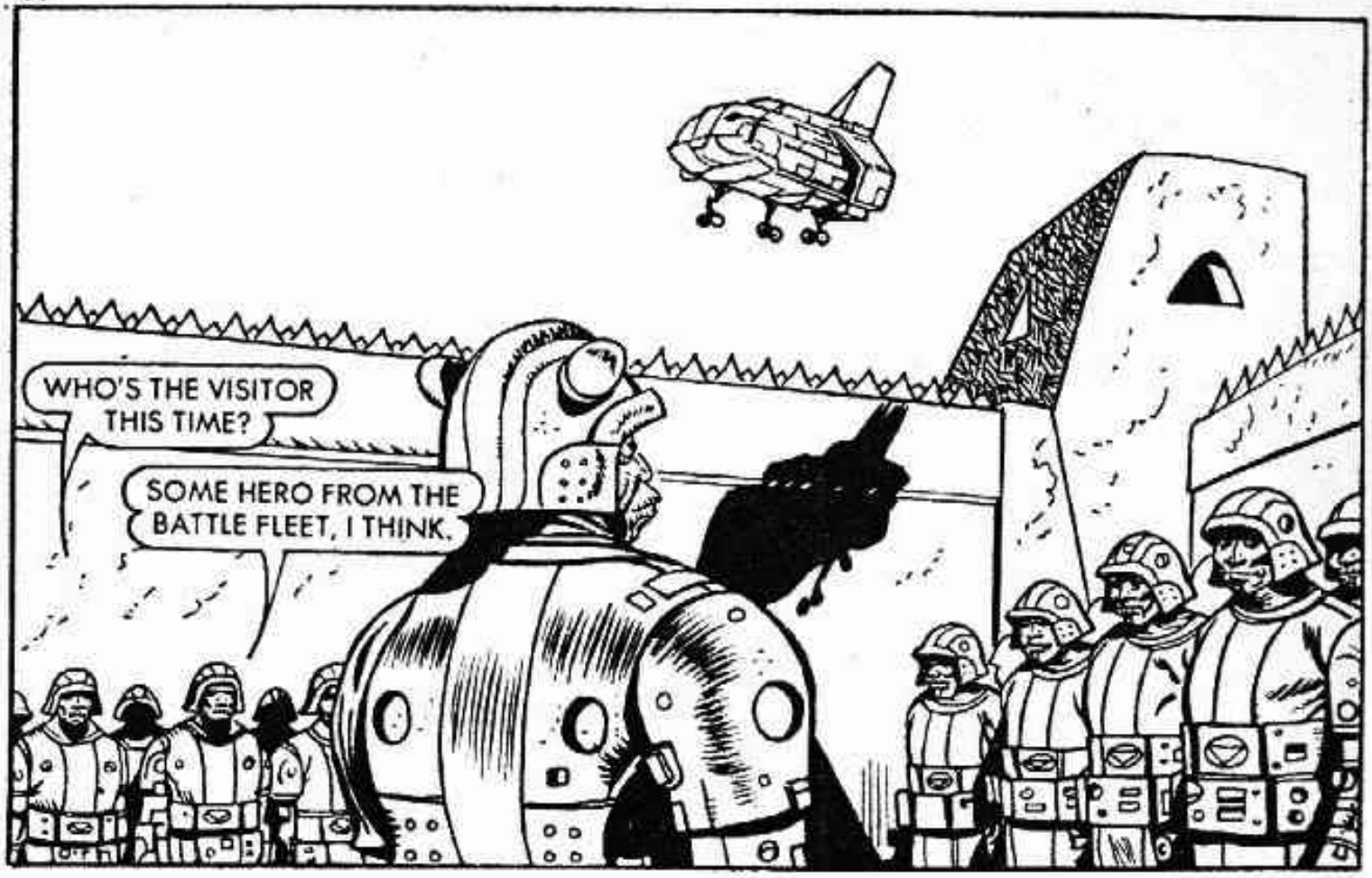
I WAS NOWHERE NEAR A SOLUTION UNTIL THEY CAUGHT ME, BUT I'VE PIECED TOGETHER SNATCHES OF CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHER PRISONERS IN HERE AND WORKED OUT A SET OF CO-ORDINATES.

WE'LL WAIT FOR THE HUE AND CRY TO DIE DOWN THEN MAKE A BREAK FOR IT.

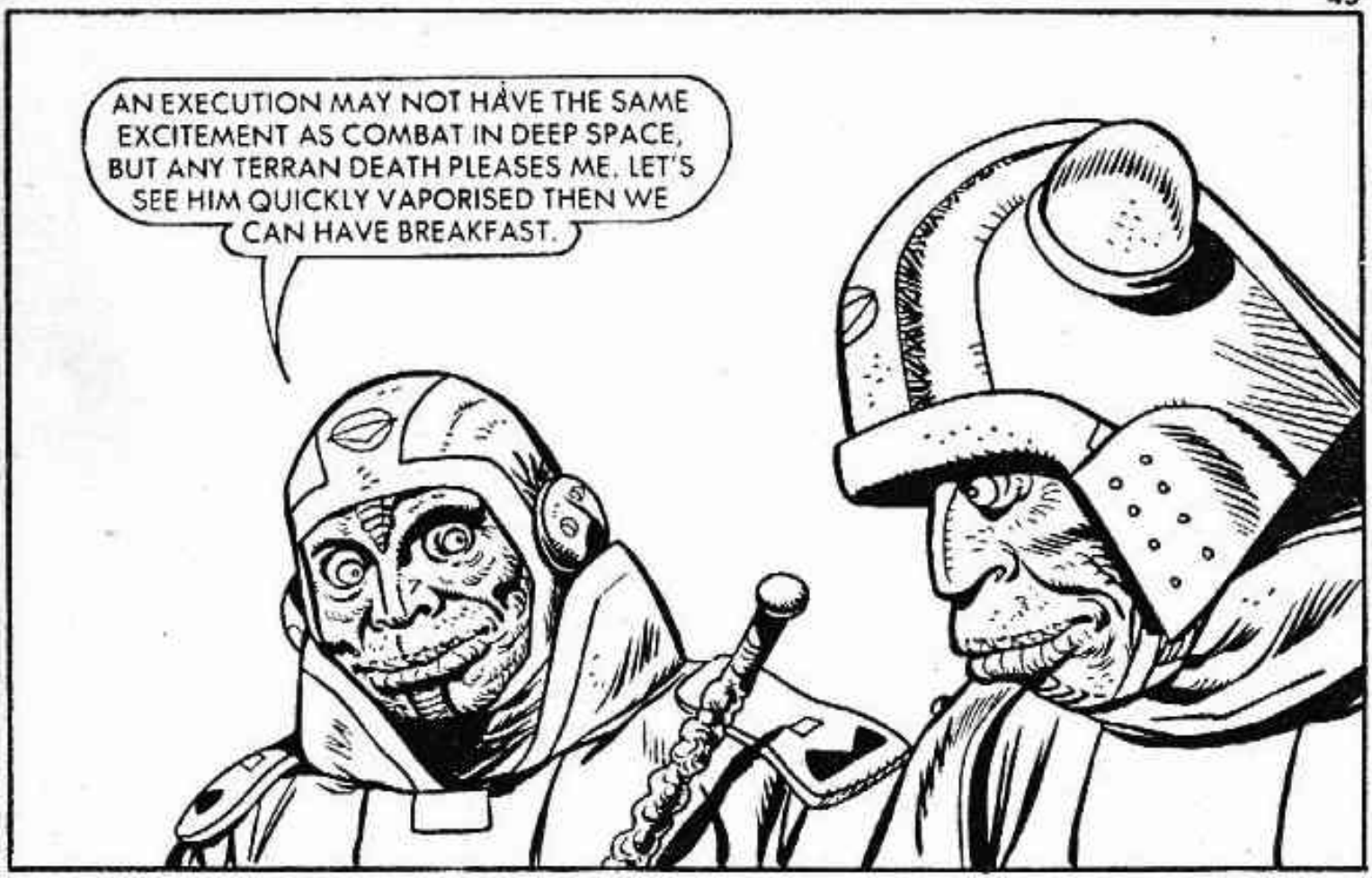
I'M SCHEDULED TO BE VAPORISED AT DAWN TOMORROW.
IF THERE HAS TO BE A CHOICE BETWEEN THE SUCCESS OF THE MISSION AND RESCUING YOU, IT'S THE MISSION THAT HAS TO COME FIRST. I'LL GO NOW.

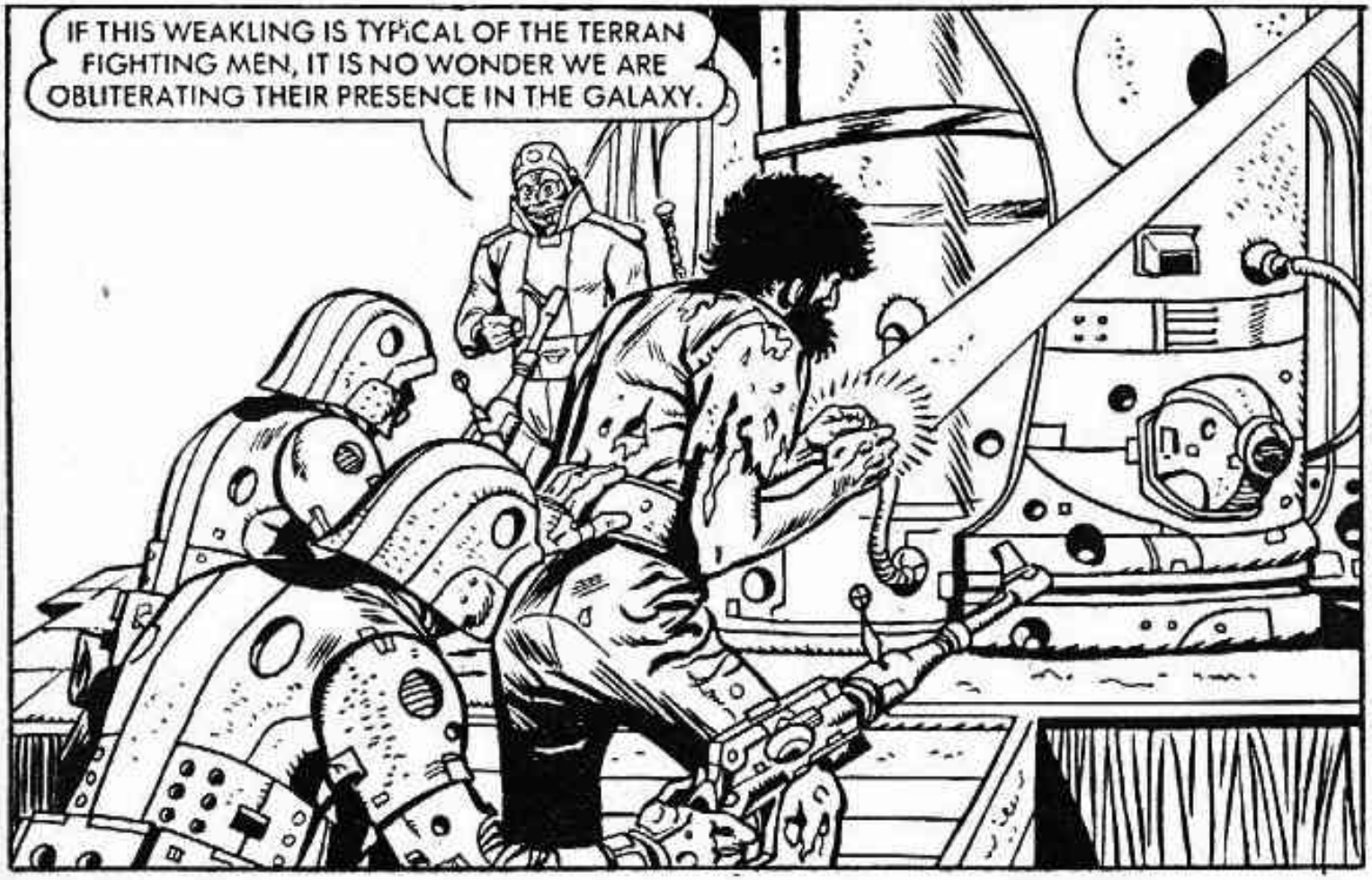
I MUST GO! DON'T WORRY . . . I'LL DO SOMETHING.


AS DAWN BROKE, A SOLITARY CRAFT FLEW OVER THE PRISON —


WHO'S THE VISITOR THIS TIME?
SOME HERO FROM THE BATTLE FLEET, I THINK.

GREETINGS, GREAT PYRAX! STORIES OF YOUR HEROIC DEEDS HAVE PRECEEDED YOU. YOU ARE HONOURED BY ALL THE FIGHTING MEN OF ANTHROS.
IT IS NO MORE THAN I DESERVE, CAPTAIN.

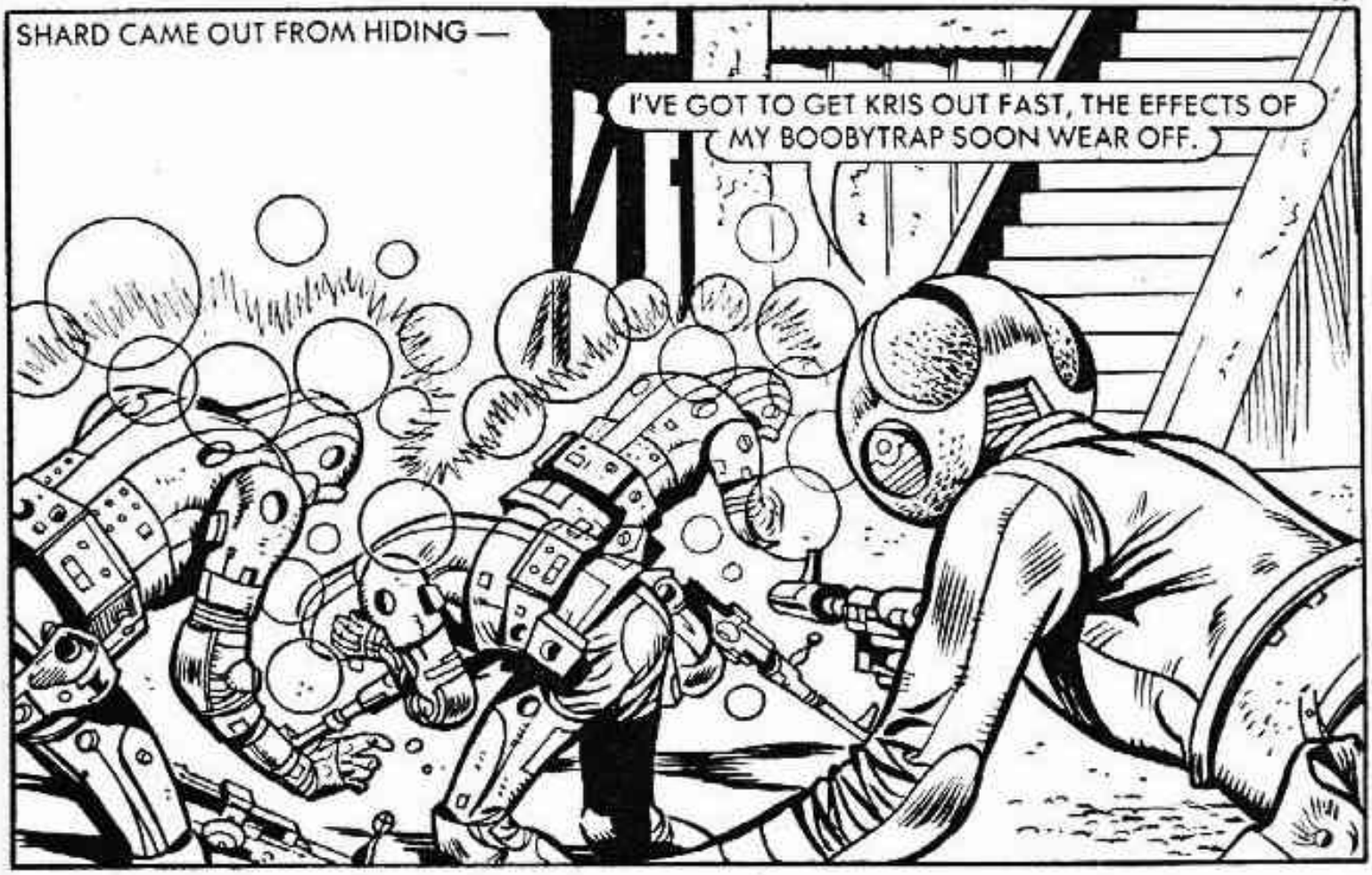

AN EXECUTION MAY NOT HAVE THE SAME EXCITEMENT AS COMBAT IN DEEP SPACE, BUT ANY TERRAN DEATH PLEASES ME. LET'S SEE HIM QUICKLY VAPORISED THEN WE CAN HAVE BREAKFAST.


IF THIS WEAKLING IS TYPICAL OF THE TERRAN FIGHTING MEN, IT IS NO WONDER WE ARE OBLITERATING THEIR PRESENCE IN THE GALAXY.

THE VAPORISING PROCESS IS SLOW AND PAINFUL! WE HOPE TO BE ENTERTAINED BY YOUR CONVULSIVE DANCE OF DEATH.

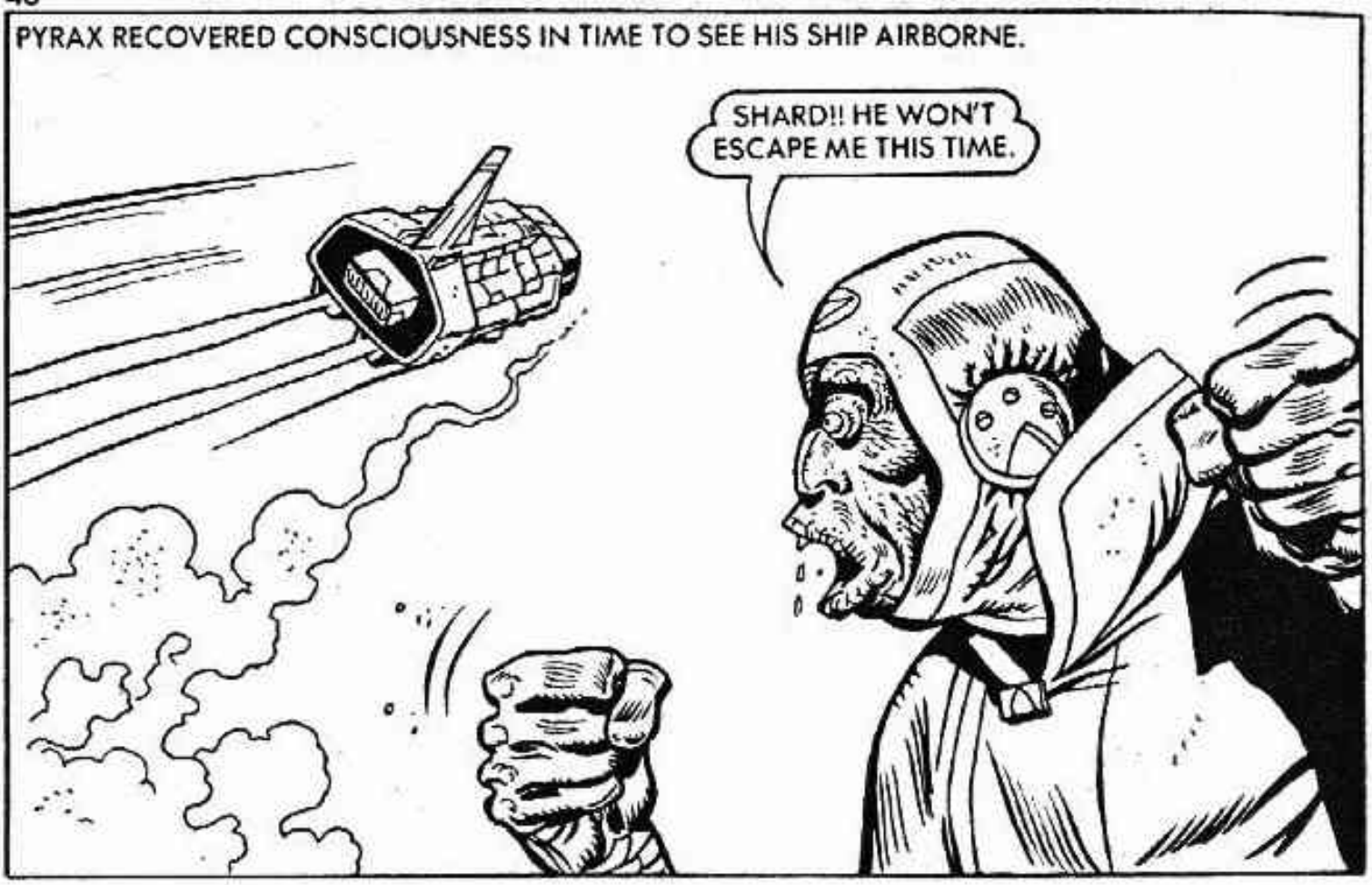
SO PERISH ALL ENEMIES OF ANTHROS!
I WISH IT WAS SHARD IN THE VAPORISING CHAMBER.

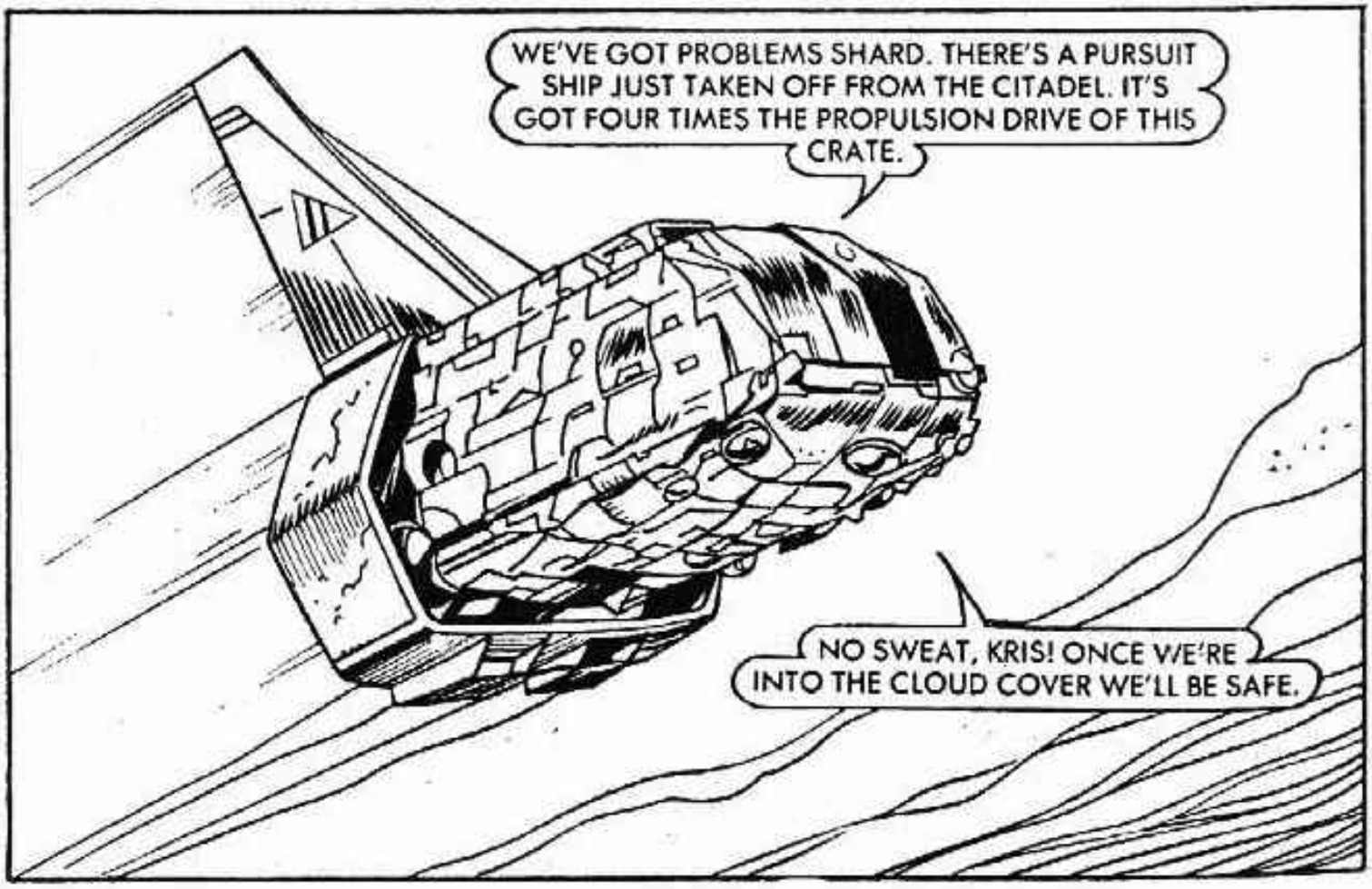
THERE IS A MALFUNCTION, SONIC WAVES . . . UNBEARABLE LEVEL.

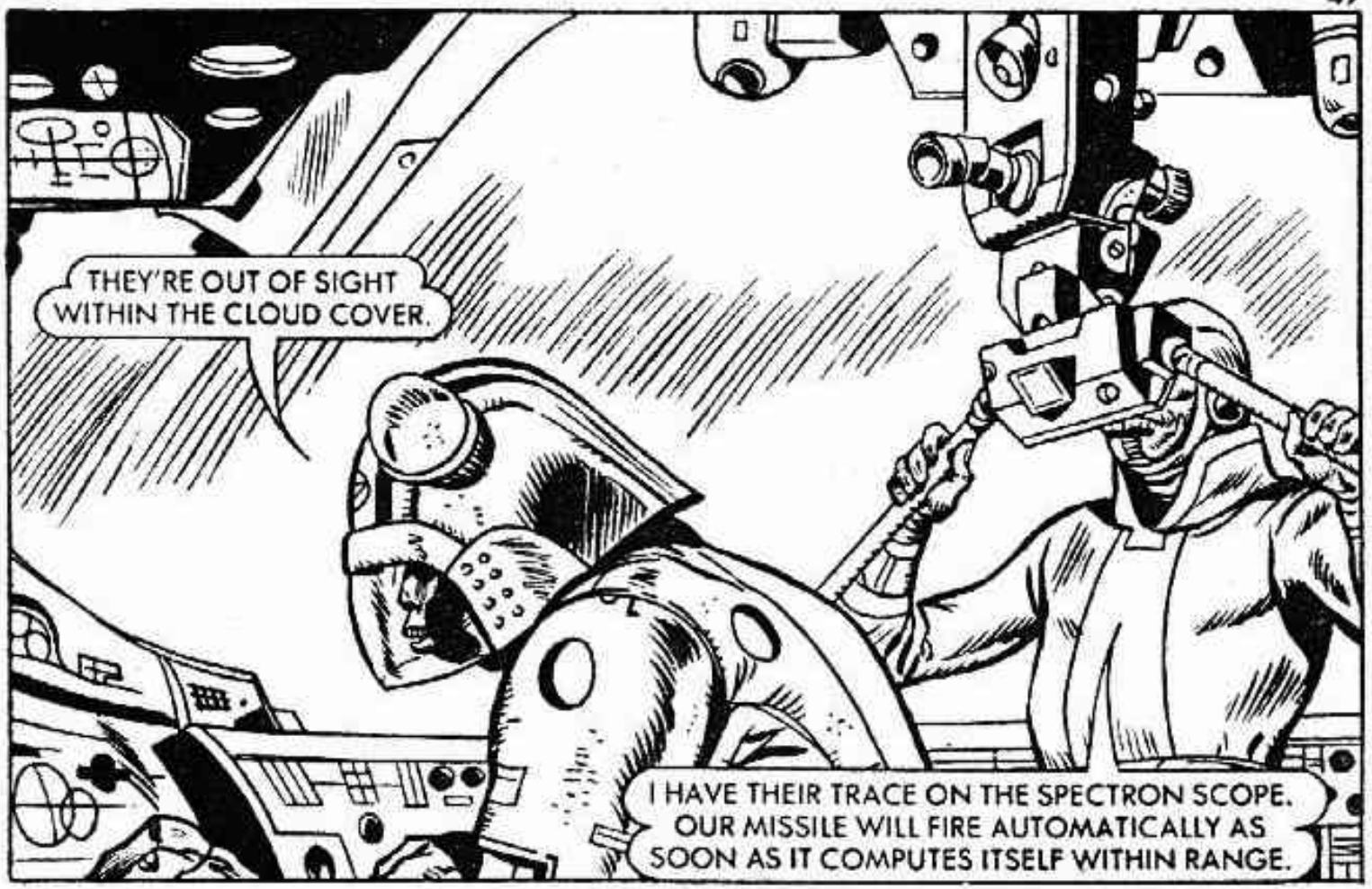

SHARD CAME OUT FROM HIDING —
I'VE GOT TO GET KRIS OUT FAST, THE EFFECTS OF MY BOOBYTRAP SOON WEAR OFF.

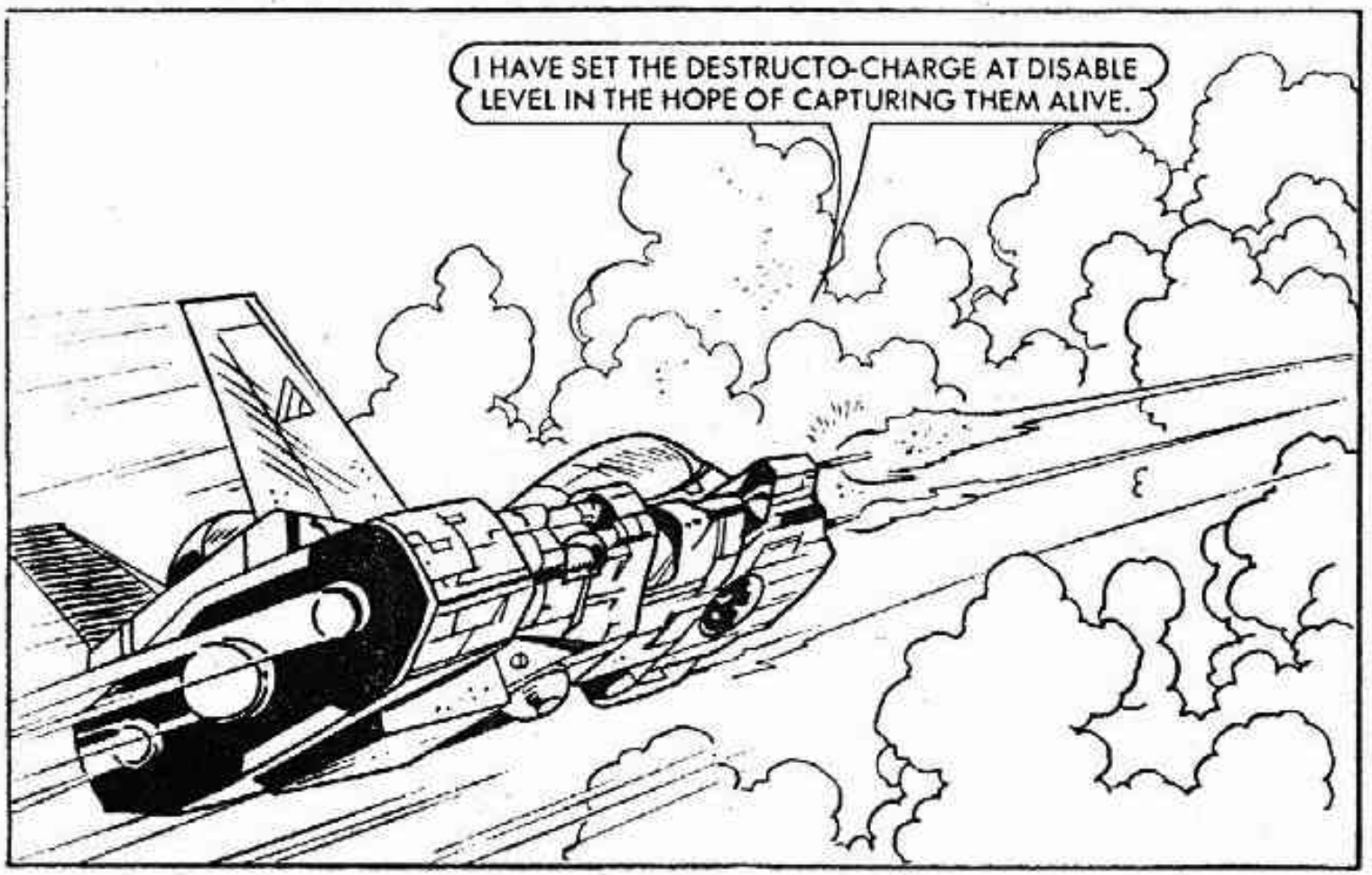
WE'LL USE THE ANTHROS SHIP TO GET AWAY BEFORE THE REST REALISE THEY'VE BEEN CAUGHT NAPPING!

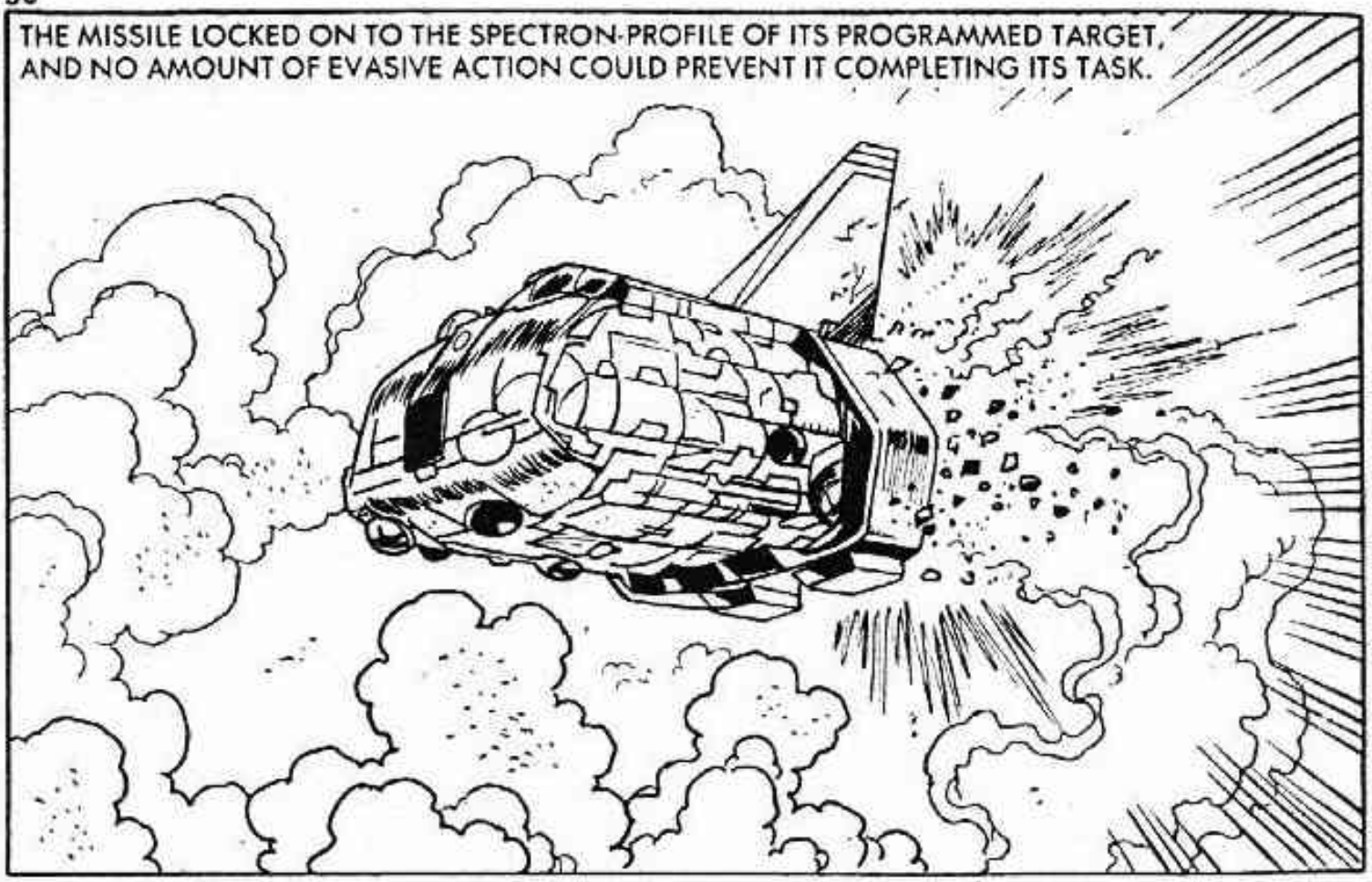
PYRAX RECOVERED CONSCIOUSNESS IN TIME TO SEE HIS SHIP AIRBORNE.

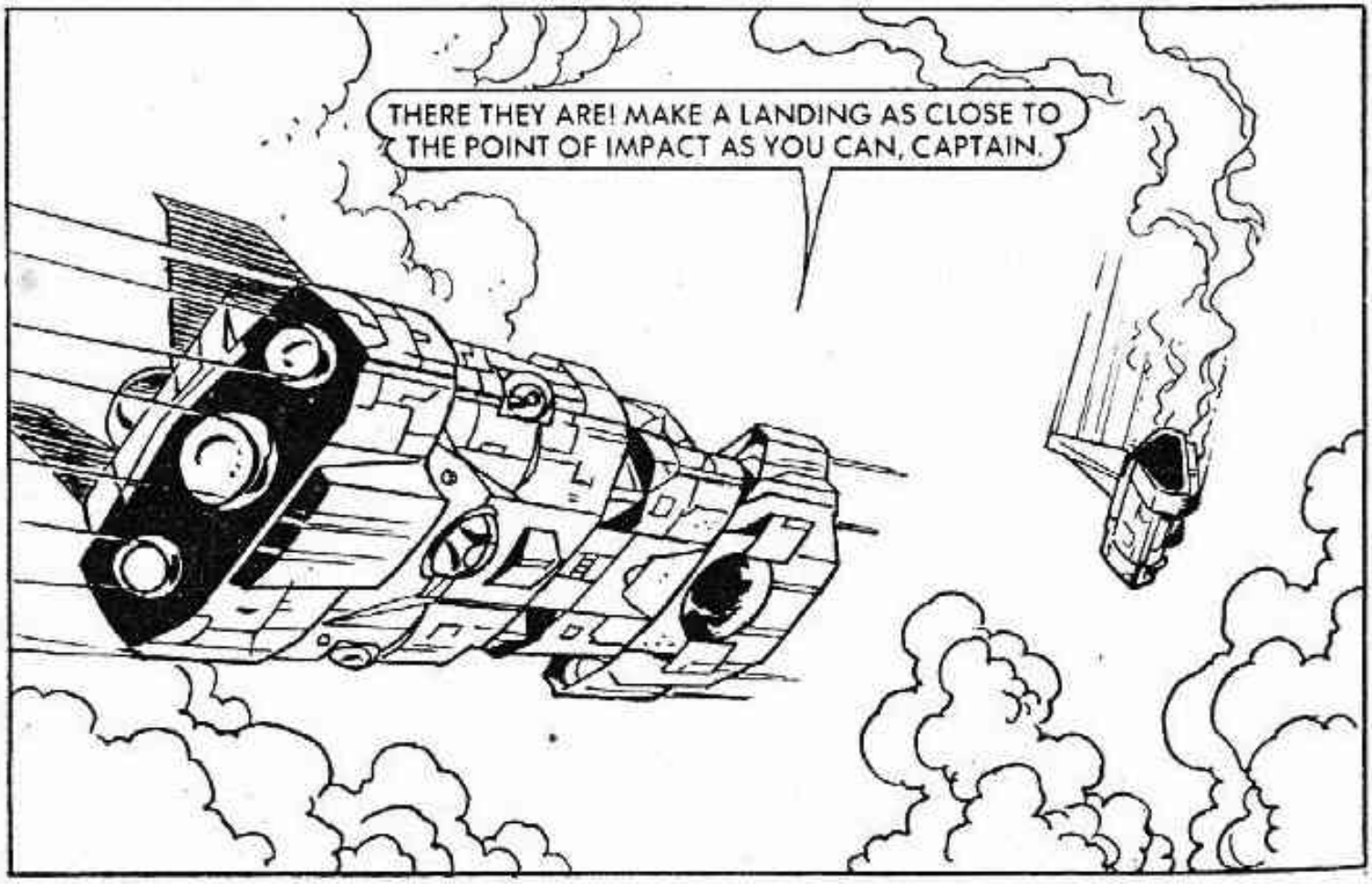




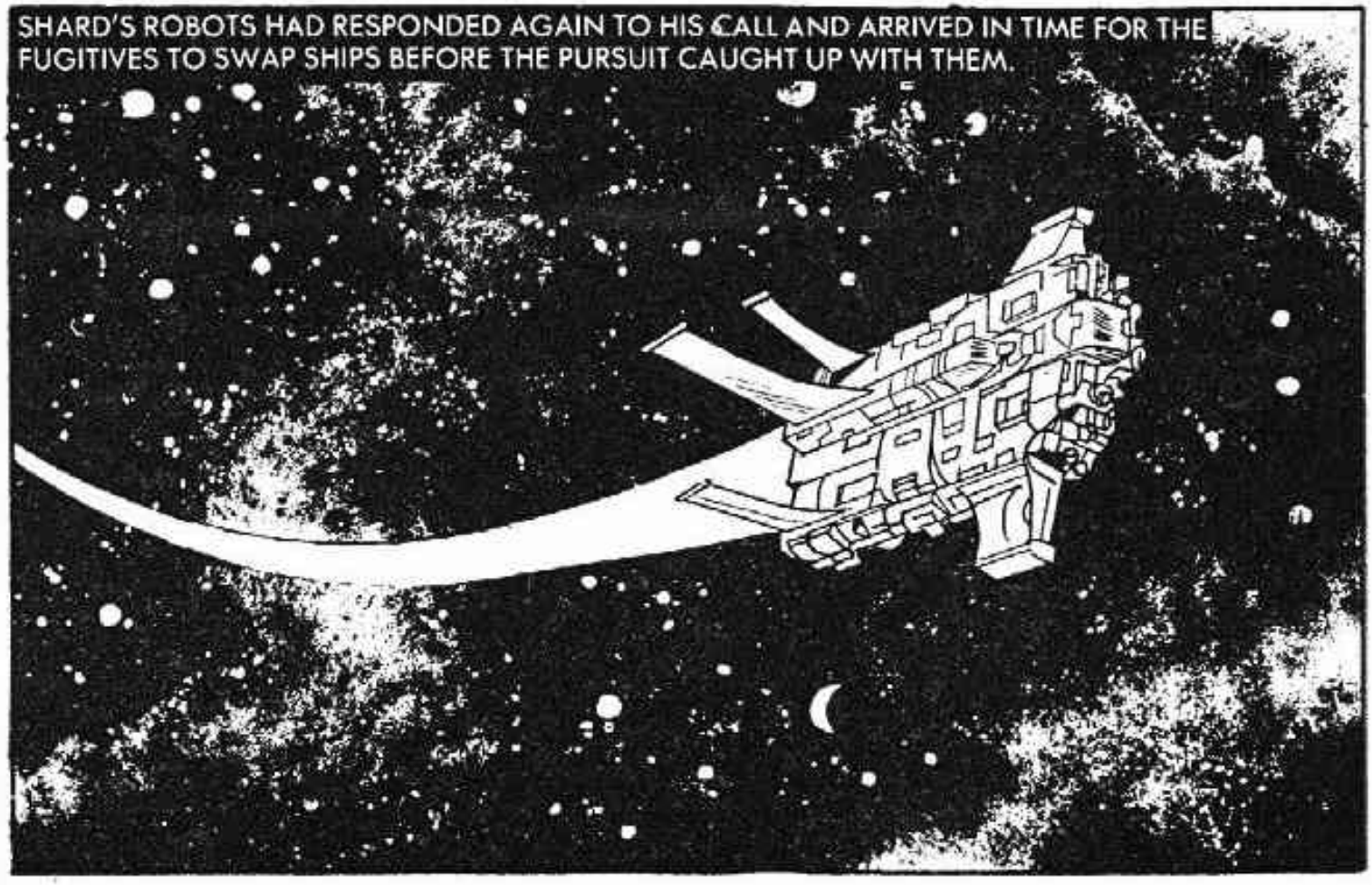

THEY'RE OUT OF SIGHT WITHIN THE CLOUD COVER.
I HAVE THEIR TRACE ON THE SPECTRON SCOPE. OUR MISSILE WILL FIRE AUTOMATICALLY AS SOON AS IT COMPUTES ITSELF WITHIN RANGE.


I HAVE SET THE DESTRUCTO-CHARGE AT DISABLE LEVEL IN THE HOPE OF CAPTURING THEM ALIVE.


THE MISSILE LOCKED ON TO THE SPECTRON-PROFILE OF ITS PROGRAMMED TARGET, AND NO AMOUNT OF EVASIVE ACTION COULD PREVENT IT COMPLETING ITS TASK.

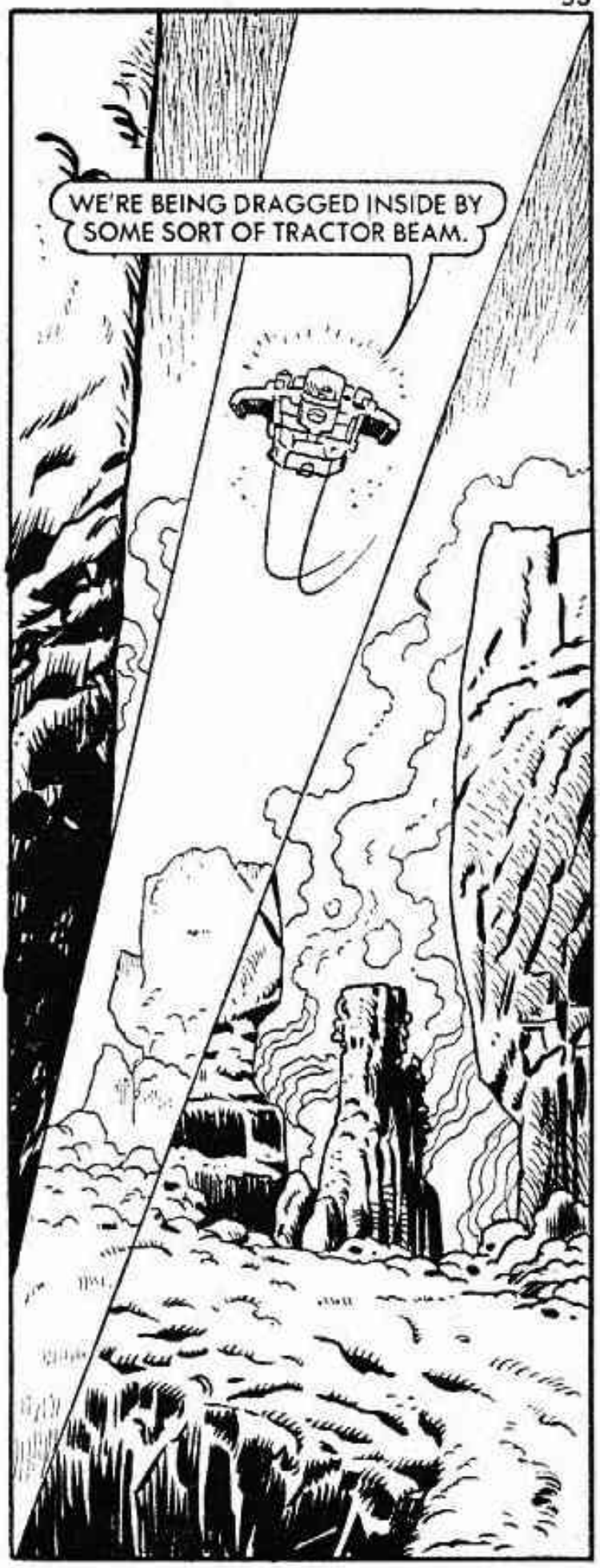

THERE THEY ARE! MAKE A LANDING AS CLOSE TO THE POINT OF IMPACT AS YOU CAN, CAPTAIN.

ONCE ON THE GROUND—
NO TERRAN BODIES. SHARD HAS TRICKED ME AGAIN, BUT I THINK I KNOW WHERE TO FIND HIM.

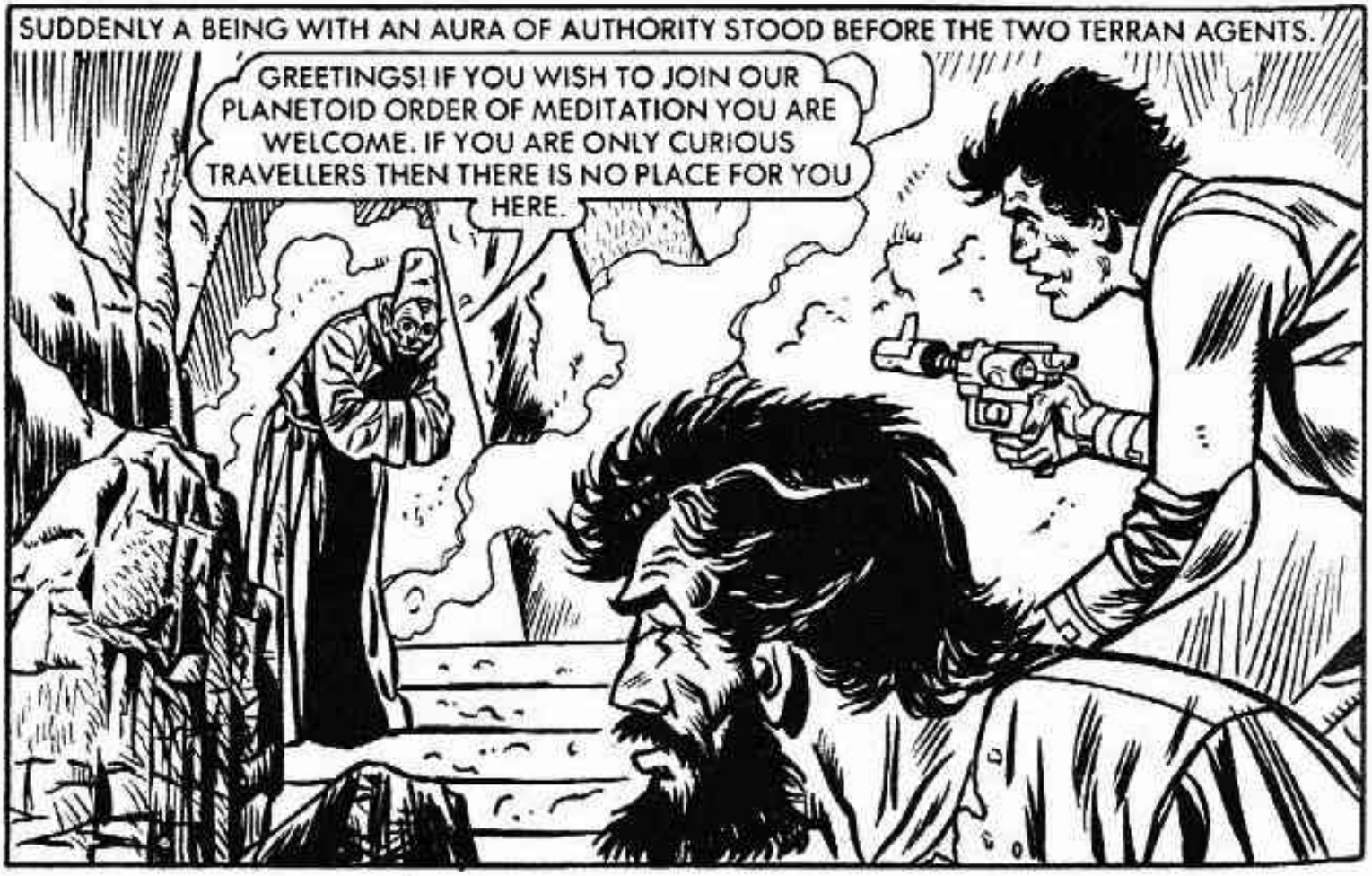

SHARD'S ROBOTS HAD RESPONDED AGAIN TO HIS CALL AND ARRIVED IN TIME FOR THE FUGITIVES TO SWAP SHIPS BEFORE THE PURSUIT CAUGHT UP WITH THEM.

SHARD AND KRIS EMERGED FROM HYPER-SPACE AT THE SUSPECTED LOCATION OF THE WARP-RAY POWER SOURCE.
WHAT'S THE GALACTIC GAZETEER SAY ABOUT THIS PLACE?
IT'S MEANT TO BE THE MONASTIC HOME OF SOME WAY-OUT MYSTIC SECT, ANTHROS IN ORIGIN.

THERE'S SOME SORT OF NUL-FORCE FIELD AROUND THAT PLACE, THE INSTRUMENTATION'S FLICKERING TO A SHUT DOWN.


WE'RE BEING DRAGGED INSIDE BY SOME SORT OF TRACTOR BEAM.

TEMPERATURES AND PRESSURE ARE KEPT AT PLANET LEVELS, SO THERE MUST BE PEOPLE HERE SOMEWHERE. LET'S TAKE A LOOK AROUND.


SUDDENLY A BEING WITH AN AURA OF AUTHORITY STOOD BEFORE THE TWO TERRAN AGENTS.
GREETINGS! IF YOU WISH TO JOIN OUR PLANETOID ORDER OF MEDITATION YOU ARE WELCOME. IF YOU ARE ONLY CURIOUS TRAVELLERS THEN THERE IS NO PLACE FOR YOU HERE.

SAVE THE FAIRY STORIES FOR THE TOURIST TRADE. WE'RE HERE TO SEE WHAT YOU'VE REALLY GOT HIDDEN AWAY HERE.
AS YOU WISH, MY BROTHERS AND I HAVE FORESWORN VIOLENCE AND CANNOT RESIST YOU.

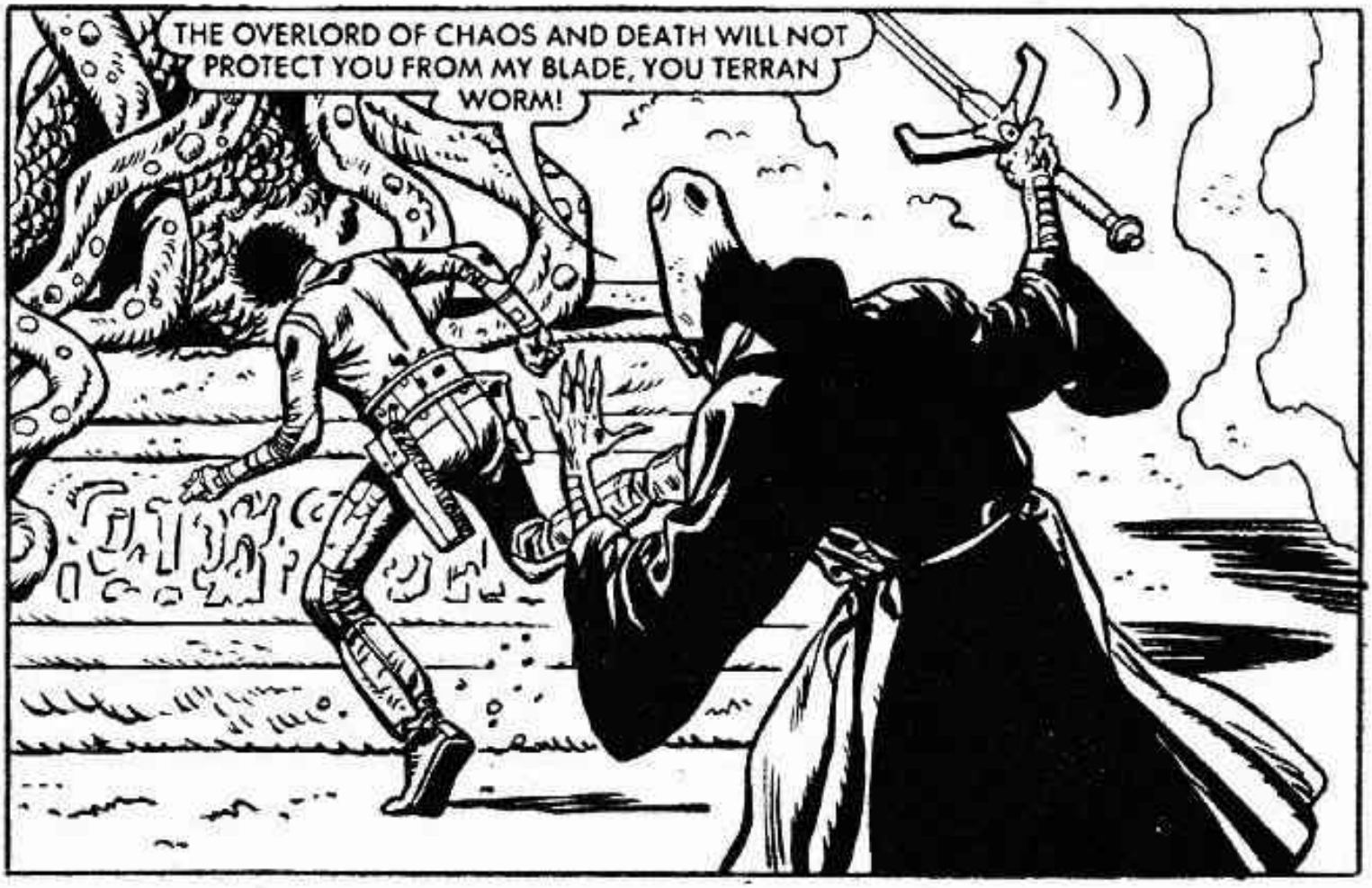
PLEASE, THIS IS OUR MOST SACRED PLACE, YOU WOULD DEFILE ITS PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY WITH YOUR PRESENCE.

IF THIS IS MEANT TO BE A TEMPLE OF PEACE AND TRANQUILLITY, WHY IS AN EVIL, MALICIOUS-LOOKING IDOL LIKE THAT GIVEN PRIDE OF PLACE?

YOU ARE RIGHT, TERRAN, OUR TRUE OVERLORD IS SORTHNA, THE ONE OF CHAOS AND DEATH.

PLUTO'S SHADES! WHAT A TIME FOR MY PISTOL TO FAIL.
ALL WEAPONS FAIL INSIDE OUR NUL-FORCE FIELD.

ONLY THE CUTTING EDGE AND THE POINT ARE EFFECTIVE HERE AS YOU WILL FIND OUT TO YOUR COST!


THE OVERLORD OF CHAOS AND DEATH WILL NOT PROTECT YOU FROM MY BLADE, YOU TERRAN WORM!

THE GUARDIAN OF THE TEMPLE INVOKED THE ANGER OF THE EVIL IDOL.
COME ALIVE O SORTHNA, AWAKEN OVERLORD OF CHAOS AND DEATH.

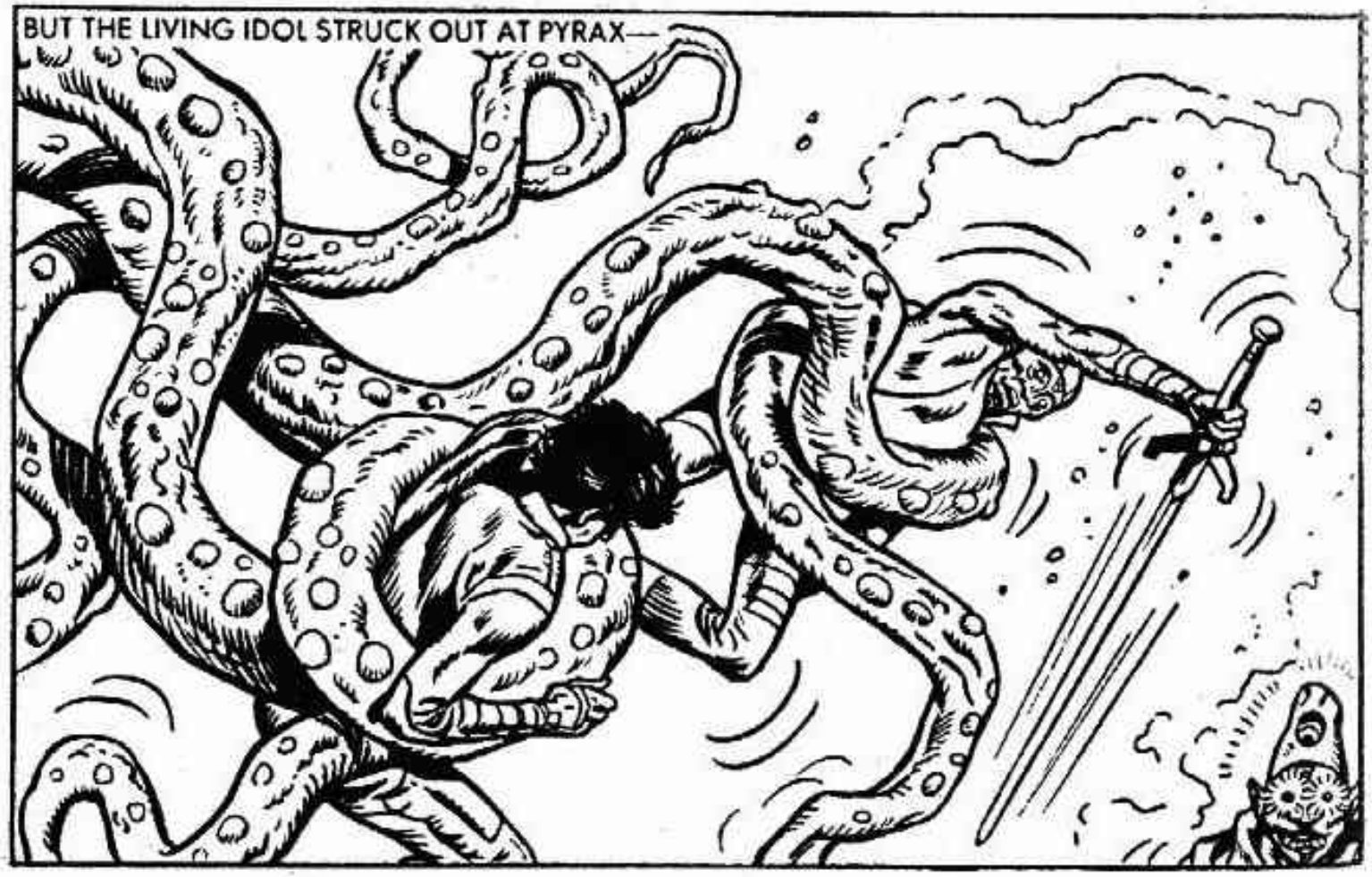
IO'S VOLCANOES! IT'S ALIVE!

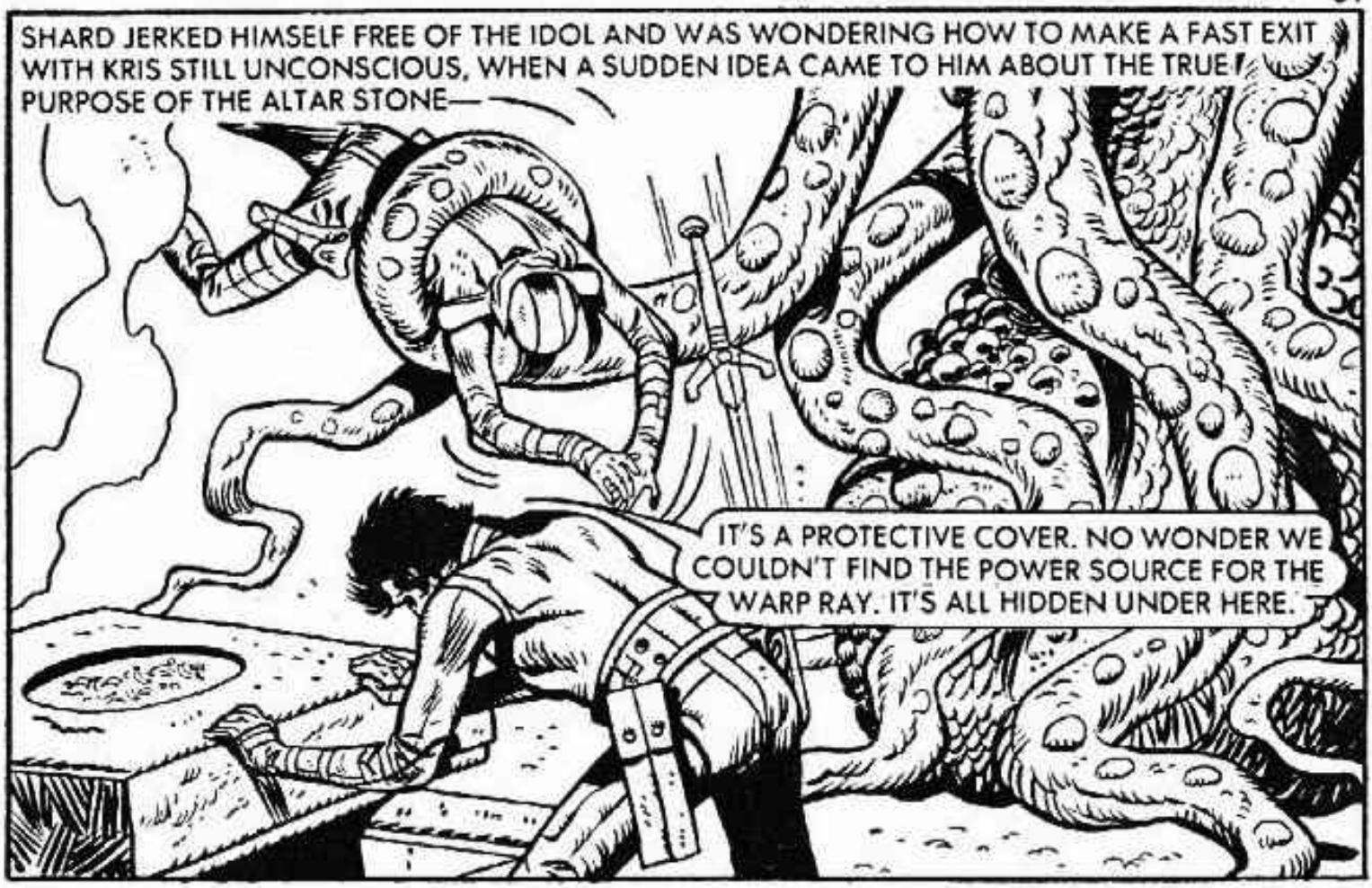
SOON THERE WILL BE BLOOD FOR THE LORD SORTHNA TO DRINK ON HIS ALTAR.

BUT BEFORE HE COULD STRIKE—
AAARRGH!

I WOULD HAVE FOLLOWED YOU TO THE ENDS OF INFINITY FOR MY REVENGE—NOBODY SHALL TAKE THAT FROM ME.

NO TEMPLE MYSTIC WILL HAVE THE PLEASURE OF KILLING YOU. THAT PLEASURE IS MINE BY ALL THE LAWS OF ANTHROS COMBAT.

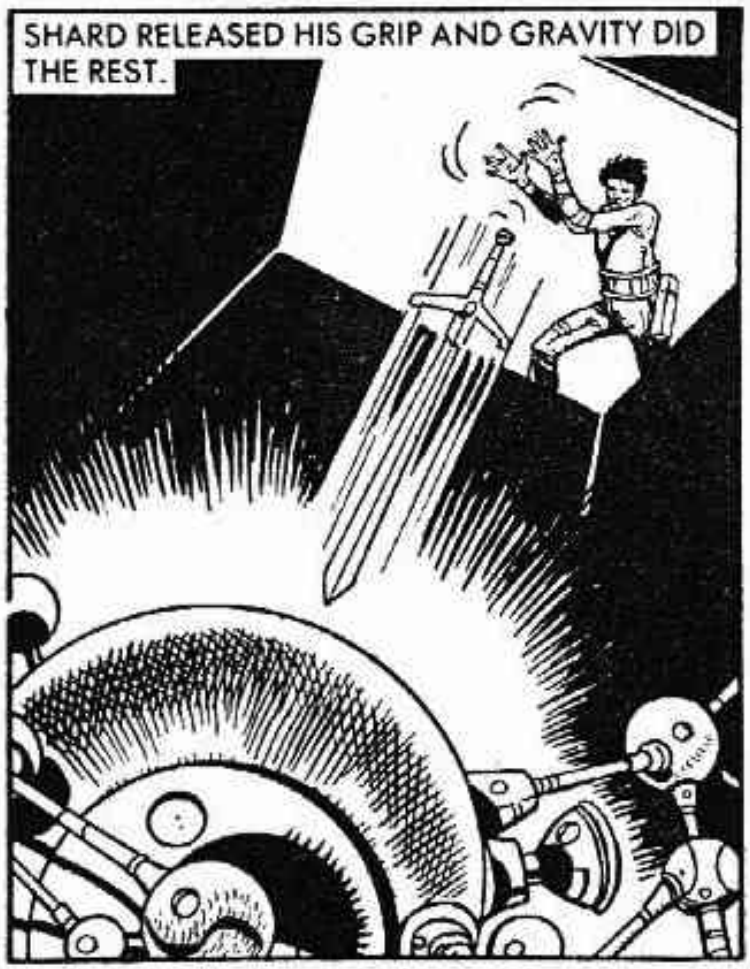

BUT THE LIVING IDOL STRUCK OUT AT PYRAX—


SHARD JERKED HIMSELF FREE OF THE IDOL AND WAS WONDERING HOW TO MAKE A FAST EXIT WITH KRIS STILL UNCONSCIOUS, WHEN A SUDDEN IDEA CAME TO HIM ABOUT THE TRUE PURPOSE OF THE ALTAR STONE—
IT'S A PROTECTIVE COVER. NO WONDER WE COULDN'T FIND THE POWER SOURCE FOR THE WARP RAY. IT'S ALL HIDDEN UNDER HERE.

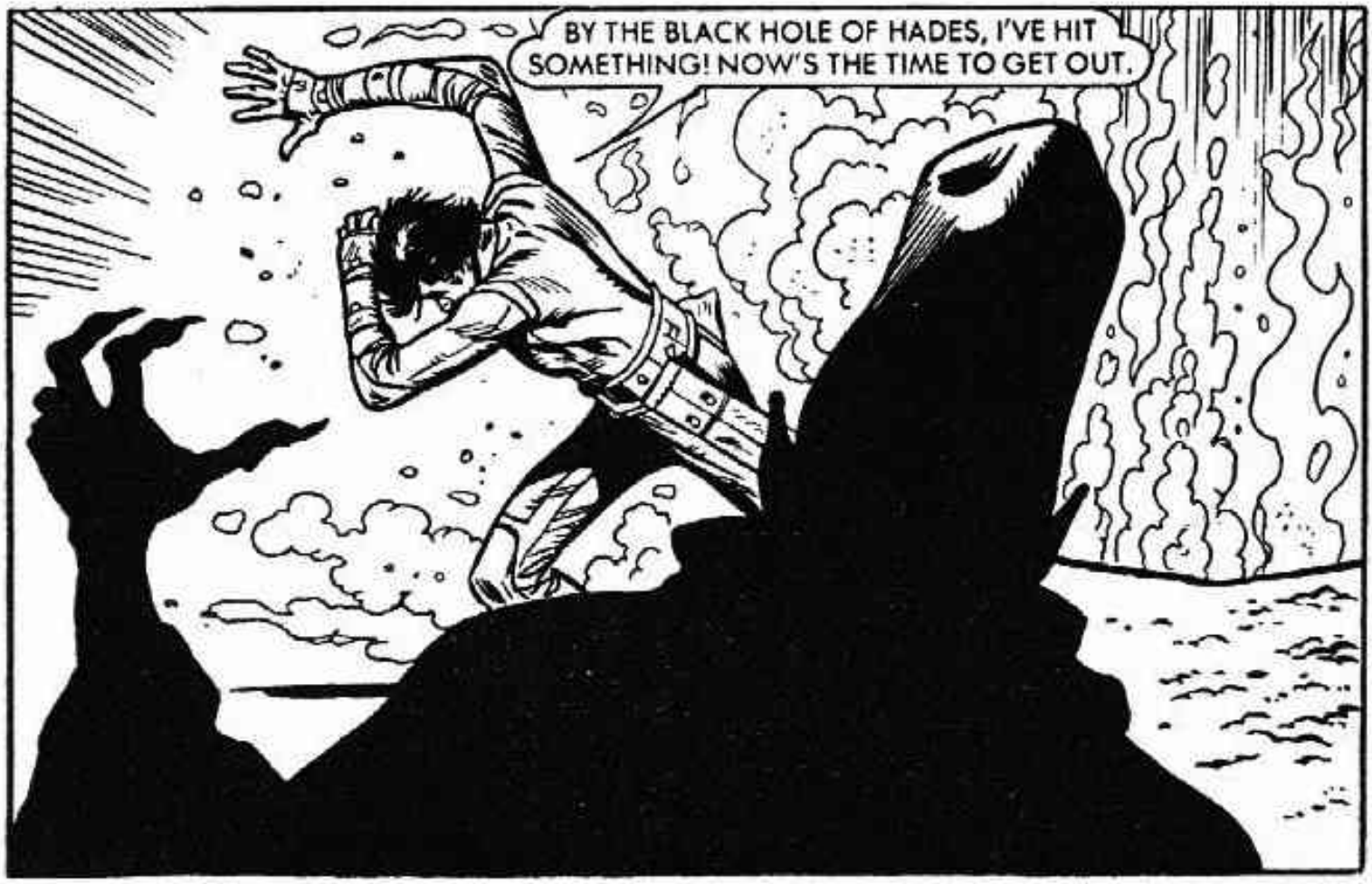
THAT'S WHAT WE CAME TO FIND! THE NATURAL POWER OF THIS PLANETOID HAS BEEN SOMEHOW TRAPPED AND CONDENSED INTO A RAY STRONG ENOUGH TO BE BEAMED THROUGH HYPER-SPACE.

IN THE ABSENCE OF A SPANNER TO THROW INTO THE WORKS, I'LL TRY THE NEXT BEST THING.

NO TERRAN! YOU'LL BE THE DESTRUCTION OF US ALL.

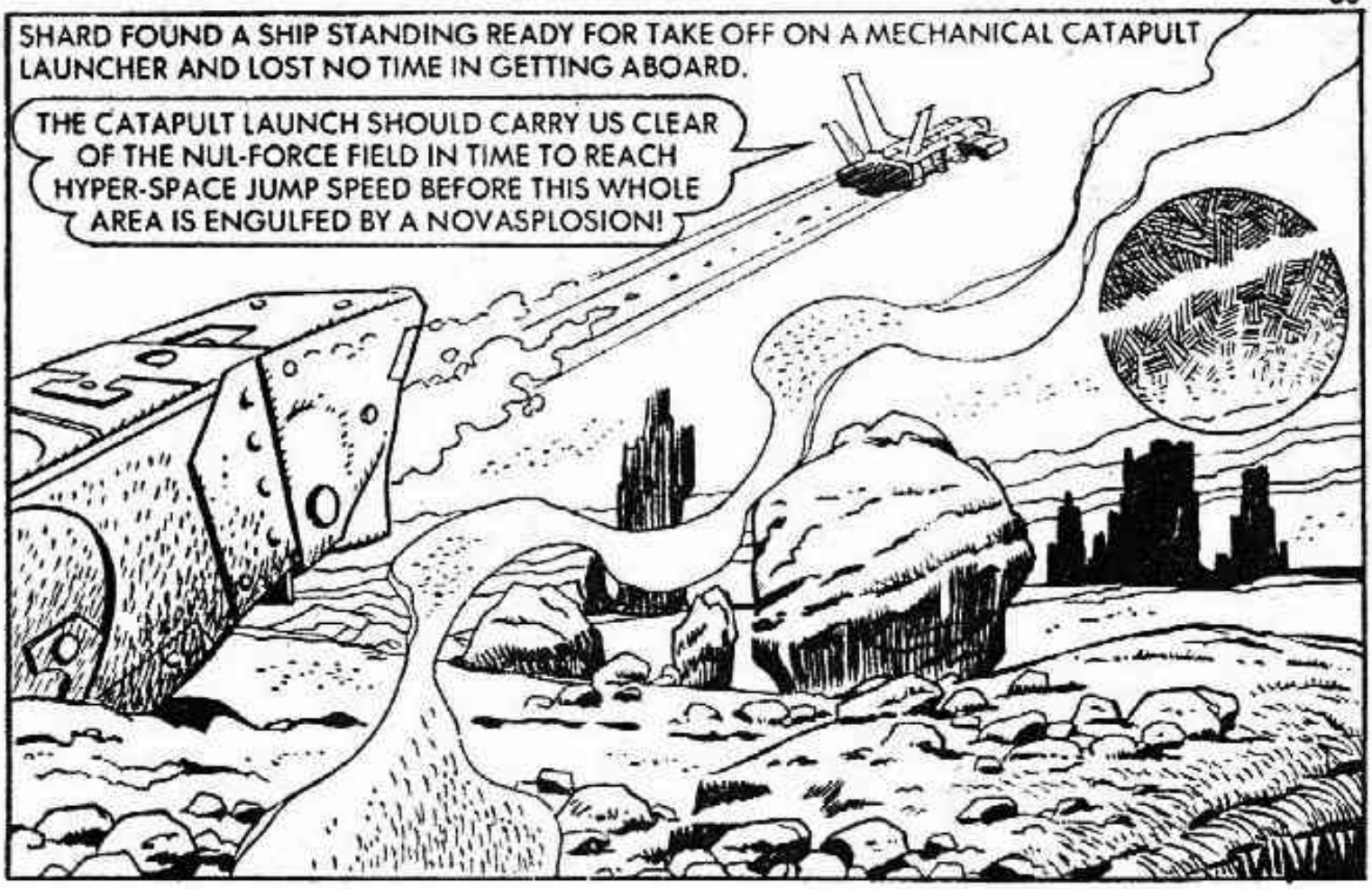

SHARD RELEASED HIS GRIP AND GRAVITY DID THE REST.

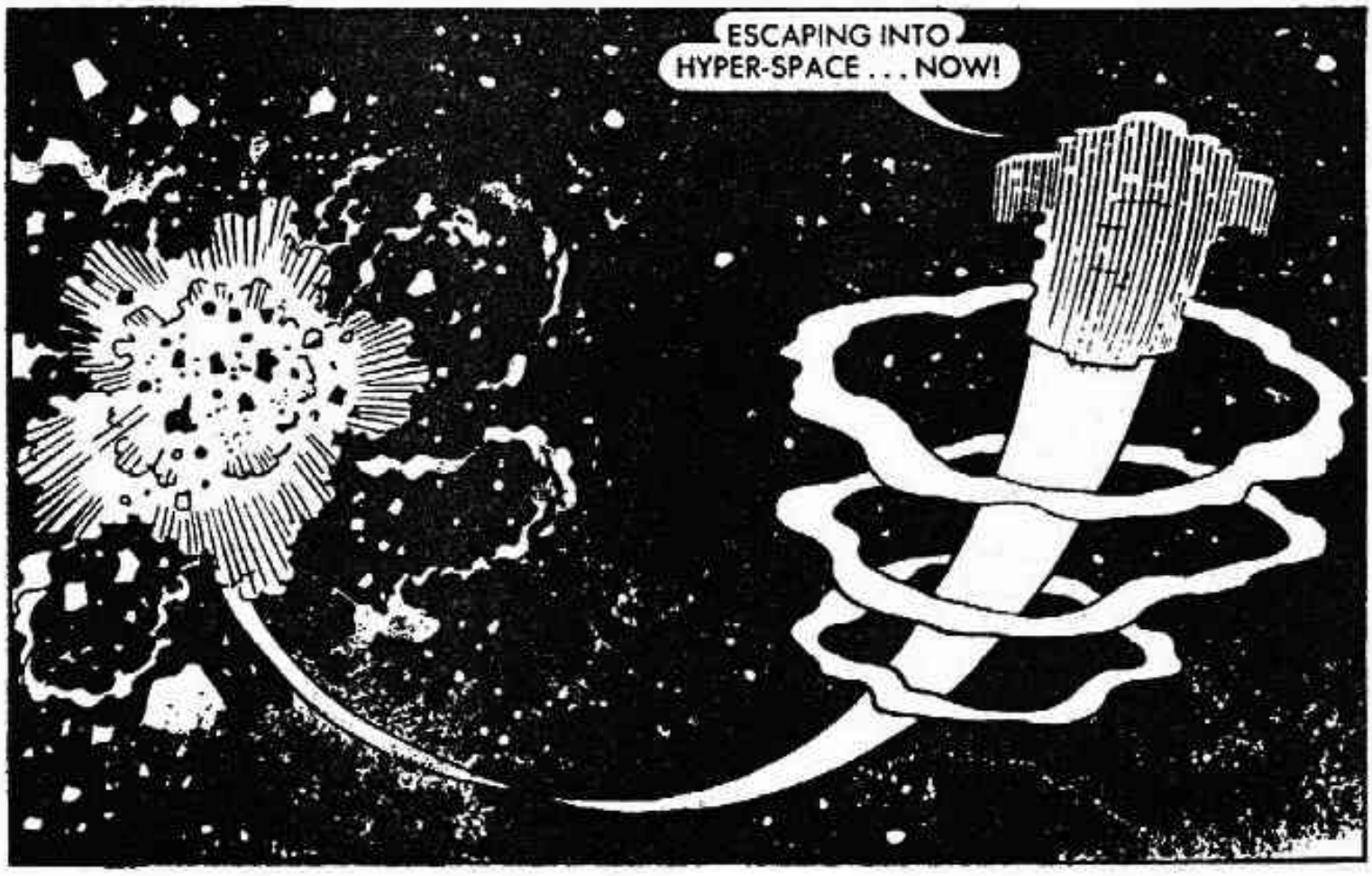
AS THE SWORD PIERCED THE HEART OF THE APPARATUS, THE WHOLE PLANETOID SEEMED TO SHUDDER.


BY THE BLACK HOLE OF HADES, I'VE HIT SOMETHING! NOW'S THE TIME TO GET OUT.

THE POWER SOURCE RELEASED THE STORED ENERGY IN A VIOLENT ERUPTION.
SORTHNA IS ANGRY WITH US, WHAT MUST THE SERVANTS DO TO STILL YOUR TUMULT?
NEVER MIND THAT MUMBO-JUMBO, GET ME FREE FROM THIS MONSTROSITY. I MUST PURSUE THAT ACCURSED AGENT SHARD.

W-WHAT'S GOING ON?
SAVE YOUR BREATH FOR WALKING, KRIS, I'LL UPDATE YOU LATER . . . IF THERE EVER IS A LATER!


SHARD FOUND A SHIP STANDING READY FOR TAKE OFF ON A MECHANICAL CATAPULT LAUNCHER AND LOST NO TIME IN GETTING ABOARD.
THE CATAPULT LAUNCH SHOULD CARRY US CLEAR OF THE NUL-FORCE FIELD IN TIME TO REACH HYPER-SPACE JUMP SPEED BEFORE THIS WHOLE AREA IS ENGULFED BY A NOVASPLOSION!


ESCAPING INTO HYPER-SPACE . . . NOW!

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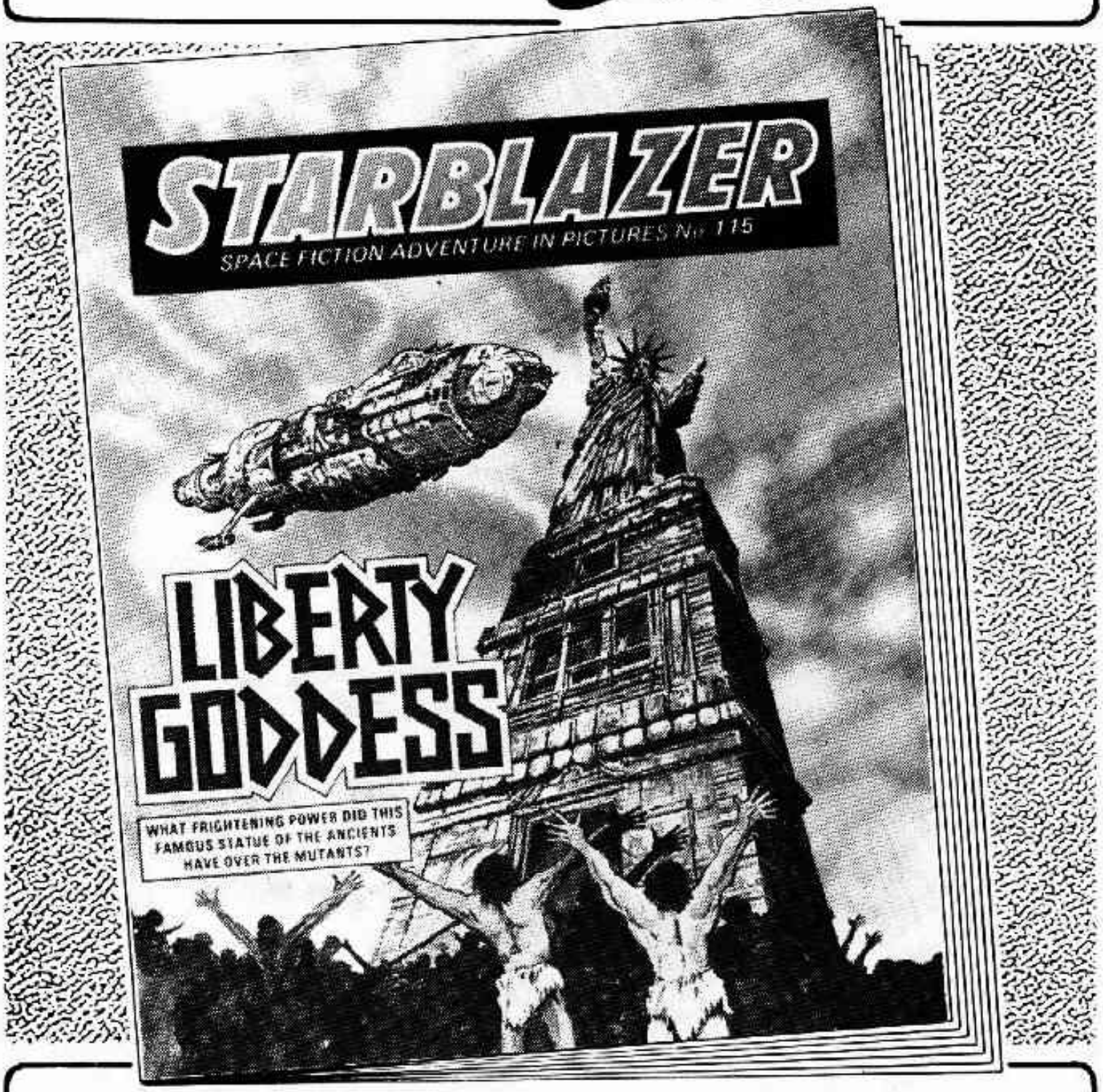
DON'T FORGET THIS MONTH'S *OTHER*



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The Pilot of Gemini 5 was Lieutenant Commander Charles 'Pete' Conrad Jr., 35. He flew on August 21, 1965, his mission lasting 7 days 22 hours 55 minutes 14 seconds. Conrad was also Gemini II's commander pilot on September 12, 1966. This flight lasted 2 days 23 hours 17 minutes 8 seconds. He was the third man on the Moon during the 10 day 4 hours 36 minute 25 second Apollo 12 mission, launched on November, 14, 1969. Finally he remained in space for 28 days O hours, 49 minutes 9 seconds on Skylab 2, launched May 25, 1973. He is now a senior vice president in a huge American company.